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SUNRISE:

A STORY OF THESE TIMES.

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BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "A PRINCESS OF THULE," "A DAUGHTER OF HETH," "MACLEOD OF DARE," ETC.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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SUNRISE.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE DEEPS.

THE sudden shock of the cold night-air was a relief to his burning brain; and so also, as he passed into the crowded streets, was the low, continuous thunder all around him. The theatres were coming out; cabs, omnibuses, carriages added to the muffled roar; the pavements were thronged with people talking, laughing, jostling, calling out one to the other. He was glad to lose himself in this seething multitude; he was glad to be hidden by the darkness; he would try to think.

But his thoughts were too rapid and terrible to be very clear. He only vaguely knew—it was a consciousness that seemed to possess both heart

and brain like a consuming fire—that the beautiful dreams he had been dreaming of a future beyond the wide Atlantic, with Natalie living and working by his side, her proud spirit cheering him on and refusing to be daunted—these dreams had been suddenly snatched away from him; and in their stead, right before him, stood this pitiless, inexorable fate. He could not quite tell how it had all occurred; but there at least was the horrible certainty, staring him right in the face. He could not avoid it; he could not shut his eyes to it, nor draw back from it; there was no escape. Then some wild desire to have the thing done at once possessed him. At once—at once—and then the grave would cover over his remorse and despair. Natalie would forget; she had her mother now to console her. Evelyn would say, "Poor devil, he was not the first who got into mischief by meddling in schemes without knowing how far he might have to go." Then amid all this confused din of the London streets, what was the phrase that kept ringing in his ears?—"*And when she bids die he shall surely die.*" But he no longer heard the pathetic vibration of Natalie Lind's voice; the words sounded to him solemn, and

distant, and hopeless, like a knell. But only if it were over—that was again his wild desire. In the grave was forgetfulness and peace.

Presently a curious fancy seized him. At the corner of Windmill Street a ragged youth was bawling out the name of a French journal. Brand bought a copy of the journal, passed on, and walked into an adjacent café, and took a seat at one of the small tables. A waiter came to him; and he mechanically ordered coffee. He began to search this newspaper for the reports usually headed *Gazette des Tribunaux.*

At last, in a corner of the newspaper, he found that heading, though under it there was nothing of any importance or interest. But it was the heading itself that had a strange fascination for him. He kept his eyes fixed on it. Then he began to see detached phrases and sentences—or perhaps it was only in his brain that he saw them: *The Assassination of Cardinal Zaccatelli.—The accused, an Englishman, who refuses to declare his name—admits that he had no personal enmity—commanded to execute this horrible crime—a punishment decreed by a Society which he will not name—confesses his guilt—is anxious to be sen-*

tenced at once and to die as soon as the law permits. . . . This morning the assassin of Cardinal Zaccatelli—who has declared his name to be Edward Bernard—was executed——

He hurriedly folded up the paper, just as if he were afraid of some one overlooking and reading these words, and glanced around. No one was regarding him. The café was nearly full; and there was plenty of laughing and talking amid the glare of the gas. He slunk out of the place, leaving his coffee untasted.

But when he had got outside, he straitened himself up, and his face assumed a firmer expression. He walked quickly along to Clarges Street. The Evelyns' house was dark from top to bottom; apparently the family had retired for the night. "Perhaps he is at the Century," Brand said to himself, as he started off again. But just as he got to the corner of the street, a Hansom drove up, and the driver, taking the corner too quickly, sent the wheel on to the kerb.

"Why don't you look where you're going to?" a voice called out from the inside of the cab.

"Is that you, Evelyn?" Brand cried.

"Yes, it is!" was the reply; and the Hansom was stopped, and Lord Evelyn descended. "I am happy to say that I can still answer for myself. I thought we were in for a smash."

"Can you spare me five minutes?"

"Five hours if you like."

The man was paid; the two friends walked along the pavement together.

"I am glad to have found you after all, Evelyn," Brand said. "The fact is, my nerves have had a bad shake."

"I never knew you had any. I always fancied you could drive a fire-brigade engine full-gallop along the Strand, on a wet night, with the theatres coming out."

"A few minutes' talk with you will help me to pull myself together again. Need we go into the house?"

"We shan't wake anybody."

They noiselessly went into the house, and passed along the hall, until they reached a small room behind the dining-room. The gas was lit, burning low. There were biscuits, seltzer-water, and spirits on the table.

Lord Evelyn was in the act of turning the gas

higher, when he happened to catch sight of his friend. He uttered a quick exclamation. Brand, who had sat down on a chair, was crying, with his hands over his face, like a woman.

"Great heavens, what is it, Brand!"

That confession of weakness did not last long. Brand rose to his feet, impatiently, and took a turn or two up and down the small room.

"What is it? Well, I have received my sentence to-night, Evelyn. But it isn't that—it is the thought of those I shall leave behind—Natalie—and those boys of my sister's—if people were to find out after all that they were related to me——"

He was looking at the things that presented themselves to his own mind; he forgot that Evelyn could not understand; he almost forgot that he was speaking aloud. But by-and-by he got himself better under control. He sat down again. He forced himself to speak calmly: the only sign of emotion was that his face was rather pale and his eyes looked tired and harassed.

"Yes, I told you my nervous system had got a shock, Evelyn. But I think I have got over it. It won't do for one in my position to abandon one's self to sentiment."

"I wish you would tell me what you mean."

Brand regarded him.

"I cannot tell you the whole thing; but this will be enough. The Council have decreed the death of a certain person; and I am appointed his executioner."

"You are raving mad!"

"Perhaps it would be better if I were," he said, with a sigh. "However, such is the fact. The ballot was taken to-night; the lot fell to me. I have no one to blame—except myself."

Lord Evelyn was too horrified to speak. The calm manner of his companion ought to have carried conviction with it; and yet—and yet—how could such a thing be possible?

"Yes, I blame myself," Brand said, "for not having made certain reservations when pledging myself to the Society. But how was one to think of such things? When Lind used to denounce the outrages of the Nihilists and talk with indignation of the useless crimes of the Camorra—how could one have thought it possible that assassination should be demanded of you as a duty?"

"But Lind!" Lord Evelyn exclaimed.

"Surely Lind does not approve of such a thing!"

"No, he does not," Brand answered. "He says it will prove a misfortune——"

"Then why does he not protest?"

"Protest against a decree of the Council!" the other exclaimed. "You don't know as much as I do, Evelyn, about that Council. No, I have sworn obedience, and I will obey."

He had recovered his firmness; he seemed resigned—even resolved. It was his friend who was excited.

"I tell you all the oaths in the world cannot compel a man to commit murder," Evelyn said hotly.

"Oh, they don't call it murder," Brand replied, without any bitterness whatever; "they call it a punishment, a warning to the evil-doers of Europe. And no doubt this man is a great scoundrel; and cannot be reached by the law; and then besides one of the members of the Society, who is poor and old and who has suffered grievous wrong from this man, has appealed to the Council to avenge him. No; I can see their position. I have no doubt they believe they are acting justly."

"But you yourself do not think so!"

"My dear fellow, it is not for the private soldier to ask whether his sovereign has gone to war justly or unjustly. It is his business to obey commands—to kill, if need be—according to his oath."

"Why, you are taking the thing as a matter of course!" Lord Evelyn cried, indignantly. "I cannot believe it possible yet! And—and if it were possible—consider how I should upbraid myself: it was I who led you into this affair, Brand."

"Oh no," said the other, absently.

He was staring into the smouldering fire; and for a second or two he sat in silence. Then he said, slowly and thoughtfully—

"I am afraid I have led a very selfish life. Natalie would not say so; she is generous. But it is true. Well, this will make some atonement. She will know that I kept my word to her. She gave me that ring, Evelyn."

He held out his hand for a moment.

"It was a pledge that I should never draw back from my allegiance to the Society. Well, neither she nor I then fancied this thing could

happen; but now I am not going to turn coward. You saw me show the white feather, Evelyn, for a minute or two: I don't think it was about myself; it was about her—and—and one or two others. You see our talking together has sent off all that nervous excitement; now we can speak about business——"

"I will not—I will not!" Evelyn said, who was greatly moved. "I will go to Lind himself. I will tell him that no duty of this kind was ever contemplated by any one joining here. It may be all very well for Naples or Sicily; it won't do for the people on this side the Channel: it will ruin his work: he must appeal—I will drive him to it!"

"My dear fellow," Brand said, quietly, "I told you Lind has accepted the execution of this affair with reluctance. He knows it will do our work—well, my share in it will be soon over—no good. But in this business there is no appeal. You are only a Companion; you don't know what stringent vows you have to undertake when you get into the other grades. Moreover, I must tell you this thing to his credit. He is not bound to take the risk of the ballot himself; but

he did, to-night. It is all over and settled, Evelyn. What is one man's life, more or less? People go to throw away hundreds of thousands of lives 'with a light heart.' And even if this affair should give a slight shock to some of our friends here, the effect will not be permanent. The organization is too big, too strong, too eager, to be really injured by such a trifle. I want to talk about business matters now."

"I won't hear you—I will not allow this——" Lord Evelyn protested, trembling with excitement.

"You must hear me; the time is short," Brand said, with decision. "When this thing has to be done I don't know; I shall probably hear to-morrow; but I must at once take steps to prevent shame falling on the few relatives I have. I shall pretend to set out on some hunting expedition or other—Africa is a good big place for one to lose one's self in—and if I do not return, what then? I shall leave you my executor, Evelyn; or rather it will be safer to do the whole thing by deed of gift. I shall give my sister's eldest son the Buckinghamshire place; then I must leave the other one some-

thing. Five hundred pounds at four per cent. would pay that poor devil Kirski's rent for him, and help him on a bit. Then I am going to make you a present, Evelyn; so you see you shall benefit too. Then as for Natalie—or rather, her mother——"

"Her mother!" Evelyn stared at him.

"Natalie's mother is in London: you will learn her story from herself," Brand continued, briefly. "In the mean time, do not tell Lind, until she permits you. I have taken rooms for her in Hans Place; and Natalie will no doubt go to see her each day; but I am afraid the poor lady is not very well off; for the family has always been in political troubles. Well, you see, Evelyn, I could leave you a certain sum, the interest of which you could manage to convey to her in some roundabout and delicate way that would not hurt her pride. You could do this, of course——"

"But you are talking as if your death was certain!" Lord Evelyn exclaimed, rather wildly. "Even if it is all true, you might escape——"

Brand turned away his head as he spoke.

"Do you think, then," he said, slowly, "that,

even if that were possible, I should care to live red-handed? The Council cannot demand that of me too. If there is one bullet for him, the next one will be for myself; and if I miss the first shot I shall make sure about the second. There will be no examination of the prisoner, as far as I am concerned. I shall leave a paper stating the object and cause of my attempt; but I shall go into it nameless; and the happiest thing I can hope for is that forgetfulness will gather round it and me as speedily as may be."

Lord Evelyn was deeply distressed. He could no longer refuse to believe. And inadvertently he bethought himself of the time when he had besought and entreated this old friend of his to join the great movement that was to regenerate Europe. Was this the end, then—a vulgar crime? The strong, manly, generous life to be thrown away; and Natalie left broken-hearted?

"What about her?" he asked, timidly.

"About Natalie, do you mean?" said Brand, starting somewhat. "Curiously enough, I was thinking about her also. I was wondering whether it could be concealed from her—whether

it would not be better to let her imagine with the others that I had got drowned or killed somewhere. But I could not do that. The uncertainty would hang over her for years. Better the sharp pain at once—of parting; then her mother must take charge of her and console her and be kind to her. What I fear most is that she may blame herself—she may fancy that she is somehow responsible——"

"It is I, surely, who must take that blame on myself," said Lord Evelyn, sadly. "But for me, how could you have been led into joining the Society?"

"Neither she nor you have anything to reproach yourselves with. What was my life worth to me when I joined? Then for a time I saw a vision of what may yet be in the world—of what will be, please God; and what does it matter if one here or one there falls out of the ranks?—the great army is moving on. And for a time there were other visions—poor Natalie!—I am glad her mother has come to her at last."

He rose.

"I wish I could offer you a bed here," Lord Evelyn said.

"I have a great many things to arrange to-night," he answered, simply. "Perhaps I may not be able to get to bed at all."

Lord Evelyn hesitated.

"When can I see you to-morrow?" he said at length. "You know I am going to Lind the first thing in the morning——"

Brand stopped abruptly.

"I must absolutely forbid your doing anything of the kind," said he, firmly. "This is a matter of the greatest secrecy; there is to be no talking about it; I have given you some hint, and the same I shall give to Natalie; and there an end." He added, "Your interference would be quite useless, Evelyn. The matter is not in Lind's hands."

He bade his friend good-night.

"Thank you for letting me bore you so long. You see, I expected talking over the thing would drive off that first shock of nervousness. Now I am going to play the part of Karl Sand with indifference. When you hear of me, you will think I must have been brought up by the Tugendbund or the Carbonari or some of those Societies."

Evelyn, still quite aghast, would have detained him; but he refused to stay. He forced his friend to shake hands with him; and then again went out into the black night. When he reached his chambers in Buckingham Street there was a small parcel awaiting him. He opened it, and found a box with, inside, a tiny nosegay of sweet-smelling flowers. These were not half as splendid as those he had got the previous afternoon for the rooms in Hans Place; but there was something accompanying them that gave them sufficient value. It was a strip of paper; and on it was written—"*From Natalie and from Natalushka, with more than thanks.*"

"I will carry them with me," he thought to himself, "until the day of my death. Perhaps they may not have quite withered by then."

CHAPTER II.

A COMMUNICATION.

Now, he said to himself, he would think no more; he would act. The long talk with Lord Evelyn had enabled him to pull himself together; there would be no repetition of that half-hysterical collapse. More than one of his officer-friends had confessed to him that they had spent the night before their first battle in abject terror; but that that had all gone off as soon as they were called into action. And as for himself, he had many things to arrange before starting on this hunting expedition, which was to serve as a cloak for another enterprise. He would have to write at once, for example, to his sister—an invalid widow, who passed her life alternately on the Riviera and in Switzerland—informing her of his intended travels. He would have to see that a sufficient sum were left for Natalie's mother,

and put into discreet hands. The money for the man Kirski would have to be properly tied up, lest it should prove a temptation. Why, those two pieces of Italian embroidery lying there: he had bought them months ago, intending to present them to Natalie; but from time to time the opportunity had been missed. And so forth; and so forth.

But despite all this fortitude, and these commonplace and practical considerations, his eyes would wander to that little handful of flowers lying on the table; and his thoughts would wander farther still. As he pictured to himself his going to the young Hungarian girl, and taking her hand, and telling her that now it was no longer a parting for a couple of years, but a parting for ever, his heart grew cold and sick. He thought of her terrified eyes; of her self-reproaches; of her entreaties, perhaps.

"I wish Evelyn would tell her," he murmured aloud, and he went to the window. "Surely it would be better if I were never to see her again."

It was a long and agonizing night, despite all his resolutions. The grey morning, appearing

palely over the river and the bridges, found him still pacing up and down there, with nothing settled at all, no letter written, no memoranda made. All that the night had done was to increase a hundredfold his dread of meeting Natalie. And now the daylight only told him that that interview was coming nearer. It had become a question of hours.

At last, worn out with fatigue and despair, he threw himself on a couch hard by, and presently sank into a broken and troubled sleep. For now the mind, emancipated from the control of the will, ran riot; and the quick-changing pictures that were presented to him were full of fearful things that shook his very life with terror. Awake, he could force himself to think of this or that; asleep, he was at the mercy of this lurid imagination that seemed to dye each successive scene in the hue of blood. First of all he was in a great cathedral, sombre and vast, and by the dim light of the candles he saw that some solemn ceremony was going forward. Priests, mitred and robed, sat in a semi-circle in front of the altar; on the altar-steps were three figures; behind the altar a space of gloom, from whence

issued the soft, clear singing of the choristers. Then, suddenly, into that clear sweet singing broke a loud blare of trumpets; a man bounded on to the altar-steps; there was the flash of a blade—a shriek—a fall; then the roar of a crowd, sullen, and distant, and awful. It is the cry of a great city; and this poor crouching fugitive, who hides behind the fountain in the Place, is watching for his chance to dart away into some place of safety. But the crowd have let him pass; they are merciful; they are glad of the death of their enemy; it is only the police he has to fear. What lane is dark enough? What ruins must he haunt, like a dog, in the night-time? But the night is full of fire; and the stars overhead are red; and everywhere there is a roar and a murmur—*the assassination of the Cardinal!*

Well, it is quieter in this dungeon; and soon there will be an end; and peace. But for the letters of fire that burn one's brain, the place would be as black as night; and it is still as night; one can sit and listen. And now that dull throbbing sound—and a strain of music—is it the young wife who, all unknowing, is digging her

husband's grave? How sad she is—she pities the poor prisoner, whoever he may be. She would not dig this grave if she knew; she calls herself *Fidelio;* she is faithful to her love. But now—but now—though this hole is black as night, and silent, and the waters are lapping outside, cannot one know what is passing there? There are some who are born to be happy. Ah, look at the faithful wife now—as she strikes off her husband's fetters—listen to the glad music, *destin ormai felice!*—they take each other's hand—they go away proudly into the glad daylight—husband and wife together for evermore. This poor prisoner listens, though his heart will break. The happy music grows more and more faint—the husband and wife are together now—the beautiful white day is around them—the poor prisoner is left alone: there is no one even coming to bid him farewell.

The sleeper moaned in his sleep; and stretched out his hand as if he would seek some other hand.

"No one—not even a word of good-bye!" he murmured.

But then the dream changed. And now it

was a wild and windy day in the blowing month of March; and the streams in this Buckinghamshire valley were swollen; and the woods were bare. Who are these two who come into the small and bleak churchyard? They are a mother and daughter; they are all in black; and the face of the daughter is pale; and her eyes filled with tears. Her face is white; and the flowers she carries are white; and that is a white tombstone —there in the corner—apart from the others. See how she kneels down at the foot of the grave; and puts the flowers lightly on the grass; and clasps her trembling hands; and prays.

"*Natalie—my wife!*" he calls in his sleep.

And behold! the white tombstone has letters of fire written on it; and the white flowers are changed to drops of blood; and the two black figures have hurried away and disappeared. How the wind tears down this wide valley, in which there is no sign of life! It is so sad to be left alone.

Well, it was about eight o'clock when he was awakened by the entrance of Waters. He jumped up, and looked around, haggard and bewildered. Then his first thought was—

"A few more nights like this, and Zaccatelli will have little to fear."

He had his bath and breakfast; all the time he was forcing himself into an indignant self-contempt. He held out his hand before him, expecting to see it tremble. But no. This reassured him somewhat.

A little before eleven he was at the house in Hans Place. He was immediately shown upstairs. Natalie's mother was there to receive him; she did not notice he looked tired.

"Natalie is coming to you this morning?" he said.

"Oh yes; why not? It gives her pleasure; it gives me joy. But I will not keep the child always in the house; no, she must have her walk. Yesterday, after you had left, we went to a very secluded place—a church not far from here—and a cemetery behind."

"Oh yes, I know," he said. "But you might have chosen a more cheerful place for your walk."

"Any place is cheerful enough for me when my daughter is with me," said she, simply. "And it is quiet."

George Brand sat with his hands clenched. Every moment he thought he should hear Natalie knock at the door below.

"Madame," he said, with some little hesitation, "something has happened of serious importance—I mean, of a little importance. When Natalie comes I must tell her——"

"And you wish to see her alone, perhaps?" said the mother, lightly. "Why not? And listen—it is she herself, I believe!"

A minute afterwards the door was opened, and Natalie entered, radiant, happy, with glad eyes. Then she started when she saw George Brand there; but there was no fear in her look. On the contrary, she embraced her mother; then she went to him, and said, with a pleased flush in her face—

"I had no message this morning. You did not care, then, for our little bunch of flowers?"

He took her hand, and held it for a second.

"I thought I should see you to-day, Natalie. I have something to tell you."

Her face grew graver.

"Is it something serious?"

"Well," said he, to gain time, for the mother

was still in the room, "it is serious or not serious, as you like to take it. It does not involve the fate of a nation, for example."

"It is mysterious, at all events?"

At this moment the elder woman took occasion to slip noiselessly from the room.

"Natalie," said he, "sit down, here by me."

She put the footstool on which she was accustomed to sit at her mother's side close to his chair, and seated herself. He took her hand, and held it tight.

"Natalie," said he, in a low voice—and he was himself rather pale—"I am going to tell you something that may perhaps startle you—and even grieve you; but you must keep command over yourself; or you will alarm your mother——".

"You are not in danger?" she cried, quickly, but in a low voice: there was something in his tone that alarmed her.

"The thing is simple enough," he said, with a forced composure. "You know that when one has joined a certain Society, and especially when one has accepted the responsibilities I have, there is nothing that may not be demanded. Look at this ring, Natalie."

"Yes, yes," she said, breathlessly.

"That is a sufficient pledge, even if there were no others. I have sworn allegiance to the Society, at all hazards. I cannot retreat now."

"But is it so very terrible?" she said, hurriedly. "Dearest, I will come over to you in America! I have told my mother—she will take me to you——"

"I am not going to America, Natalie."

She looked up bewildered.

"I have been commissioned to perform another duty—more immediate, more definite. And I must tell you now, Natalie—all that I dare tell you; you must be prepared; it is a duty which will cost me my life."

"Your life?" she repeated, in a bewildered, wild way, and she hastily drew her hand away from his. "Your life?"

"Hush, Natalie!"

"You are to die?" she exclaimed; and she gazed with terror-stricken eyes into his face. She forgot all about his allegiance to the Society; she forgot all about her theories of self-sacrifice; she only heard that the man she

loved was doomed; and she said in a low, hoarse voice—"And it is I, then, who have murdered you!"

"Natalie!" he cried; and he would have taken her hand again; but she withdrew from him, shuddering. She clasped her hands over her face.

"Oh, do not touch me," she said, "do not come near me. I have murdered you: it is I who have murdered you!"

"For Heaven's sake, Natalie, be calm!" he said to her, in a low, earnest voice. "Think of your mother: do not alarm her. You knew we might be parted for years—well, this parting is a little worse to bear, that is all—and you, who gave me this ring, you are not going to say a word of regret. No, no, Natalushka, many thousands and thousands of people in the world have gone through what stands before us now; and wives have parted from their husbands without a single tear, so proud were they——"

She looked up quickly; her face was white.

"I have no tears," she said, "none! But some wives have gone with their husbands into the danger, and have died too—ah, how happy that

were for any one!—and I, why may not I go? am not afraid to die."

He laid his hand gently on the dark hair.

"My child, it is impossible," he said; and then he added, rather sadly, "It is not an enterprise that any one is likely to gain any honour by; it is far from that. But it has to be undertaken; that is enough. As for you—you have your mother to care for now. Will not that fill your life with gladness?"

"How soon—do—you go away?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Almost immediately," he said, watching her. She had not shed a single tear; but there was a strange look on her face. "Nothing is to be said about it. I shall be supposed to have started on a travelling expedition, that is all."

"And you go—for ever?"

"Yes."

She rose.

"We shall see you yet before you go?"

"Natalie," he said, in despair, "I had come to try to say good-bye to you. But I cannot, my darling, I cannot! I must see you again."

"I do not understand why you should wish to

see again one like me," she said, slowly; and the voice did not sound like her own voice. "I have given you over to death; and, more than that, to a death that is not honourable; and yet I cannot even tell you that I am grieved. But there is pain here." She put her hand over her heart; she staggered back a little bit; he caught her.

"Natalie—Natalie!"

"It is a pain that kills," she said, wildly.

"Natalie, where is your courage? I give my life without question; you must bear your part too."

She still held her hand over her bosom.

"Yes," she said, as if she had not heard him, "that is what they say; it kills, this pain in the heart. Why not—if one does not wish to live?"

At this moment the door was opened, and the mother came into the room.

"Madame," said Brand, quickly, "come and speak to your daughter. I have had to tell her something that has upset her, perhaps, for a moment; but you will console her; she is brave."

"Child, how you tremble, and how cold your hands are!" the mother cried.

"It does not matter, mother. From every pain there is a release, is there not?"

"I do not understand you, Natalushka!"

"And I—and I, mother——"

She was on the point of breaking down; but she held firm.

Then she released herself from her mother's hold, and went forward and took her lover's hand, and regarded him with the sad, tearless, beautiful eyes.

"I have been selfish," she said; "I have been thinking of myself, when that is needless. For me, there will be a release—quickly enough: I shall pray for it. Now tell me what I must do: I will obey you."

"First, then," said he, speaking in a low voice, and in English, so that her mother should not understand, "you must make light of this affair, or you will distress your mother greatly, and she is not able to bear distress. Some day, if you think it right, you may tell her; you know nothing that could put the enterprise in peril; she will be as discreet and silent as yourself, Natalie. Then you must put it out of your mind, my darling, that you have any share in

what has occurred. What have I to regret? My life was worthless to me; you made it beautiful for a time; perhaps, who knows, it may after all turn out to have been of some service; and then there can be no regret at all. They think so; and it is not for me to question."

"May I not tell my mother now?" she said, imploringly. "Dearest, how can I speak to her, and be thinking of you far away?"

"As you please, Natalie. The little I have told you or Evelyn can do no harm, so long as you keep it amongst yourselves."

"But I shall see you again?" It was her heart that cried to him.

"Oh yes, Natalie," he said, gravely. "I may not have to leave England for a week or two. I will see you as often as I can until I go, my darling—though it may only be torture to you."

"Torture?" she said, sadly. "That will come after—until there is an end of the pain."

"Hush, you must not talk like that. You have now one with you whom it is your duty to support and console. She has not had a very happy life either, Natalie."

He was glad now that he was able to leave this terror-stricken girl in such tender hands. And as for himself, he found, when he had left, that somehow the strengthening of another had strengthened himself. He had less dread of the future; his face was firm; the time for vain regrets was over.

CHAPTER III.

A QUARREL.

MEANWHILE, almost immediately after George Brand had left the house in Lisle Street, Reitzei and Beratinsky left also. On shutting the street-door behind them, Beratinsky bade a curt good-night to his companion, and turned to go; but Reitzei, who seemed to be in very high spirits, stayed him.

"No, no, friend Beratinsky; after such a fine night's work, I say we must have a glass of wine together. We will walk up to the *Culturverein*."

"It is late," said the other, somewhat ungraciously.

"Never mind. An hour, three-quarters of an hour, half an hour, what matter? Come," said he, laying hold of his arm and taking him away unwillingly, "it is not polite of you to force me to invite myself. I do not suppose it is the cost of

the wine you are thinking of. Mark my words, when I am elected a member, I shall not be stingy."

Beratinsky suffered himself to be led away; and together the two walked up towards Oxford Street. Beratinsky was silent, and even surly; Reitzei garrulous and self-satisfied.

"Yes, I repeat it; a good night's work. For the thing had to be done; there were the Council's orders; and who so appropriate as the Englishman? Had it been you or I, Beratinsky, or Lind, how could any one of us have been spared? No doubt the Englishman would have been glad to have Lind's place—yes, and Lind's daughter, too: however, that is all settled now; and very well done. I say it was very well done, on the part of Lind. And what did you think of my part, friend Beratinsky?"

"I think you made a fool of yourself, friend Reitzei," said the other, abruptly.

Reitzei was a vain young man; and he had been fishing for praise.

"I don't know what you mean," he said, angrily.

"What I mean I say," replied the other, with

something very like cool contempt. "I say you made a fool of yourself. When a man is drunk he does his best to appear sober; you, being sober, tried to appear drunk—and made a fool of yourself."

"My friend Beratinsky," said the younger man, hotly, "you have a right to your own opinion—every man has that. But you should take care not to make an ass of yourself by expressing it. Do not speak of things you know nothing about—that is my advice to you."

Beratinsky did not answer; and the two walked on in silence until they reached the *Verein* and entered the long, resounding hall, which was nearly empty. But the few members who remained were making up for their paucity of numbers by their mirth and noise. As Beratinsky and his companion took their seats at the upper end of the table, the chairman struck his hammer violently, and commanded silence.

"Silentium, meine Herren!" he thundered out. "I have a secret to communicate. A great honour has been done one of our members; and even his overwhelming modesty permits it to be known at last. Our good friend Josef Hempel

has been appointed Hof-Maler to the Grand Duke of ——. I call on you to drink his health and the Grand Duke's too!"

Then there was a quick filling of glasses; a general uprising; cries of "Hempel!" "Hempel!" "The Duke!" followed by a resounding chorus—

"Hoch sollen sie leben!
Hoch sollen sie leben!
Dreimal hoch!—"

that echoed away down the empty hall. Then the tumult subsided; and the president, rising, said gravely—

"I now call on our good friend Hempel to reply to the toast; and to give us a few remarks on the condition of art in the Grand Duchy of ——, with some observations and reflections on the altered position of the Duchy since the unification of our Fatherland."

In answer to this summons there rose to his feet a short, stout old gentleman, with a remarkably fresh complexion, silvery-white hair, and merry blue eyes that peered through gold-rimmed spectacles. He was all smiles and blushes; and the longer they cheered, the more did he smile and blush.

"'"Gentlemen," he said; and this was the signal for further cheering. "Gentlemen," said the blushing orator, at length, "our friend is at his old tricks. I cannot make a speech to you—except this: I ask you to drink a glass of champagne with me. Kellner—Champagner!"

And he incontinently dropped into his seat again, having forgotten altogether to acknowledge the compliment paid to himself and the Grand Duke.

However, this was like the letting in of water. For no sooner had the two or three bottles ordered by Herr Hempel been exhausted than one after another of his companions seemed to consider it was their turn now; and loud-shouted orders were continually being administered to the busy waiter. Wine flowed and sparkled; cigars were freely exchanged; the volume of conversation rose in tone, for all were speaking at once; the din became fast and furious.

In the midst of all this Reitzei alone sat apart and silent. Ever since coming into the room the attention of Beratinsky had been monopolized by his neighbour, who had just come back from a great artistic fête in some German town, and who,

dressed as the Emperor Barbarossa, and followed by his knights, had ridden up the big staircase into the town-hall. The festivities had lasted for a fortnight; the Staatsweinkeller had furnished liberal supplies; the Princess Adelheid had been present at the crowning ceremony. Then he had brought with him sketches of the various costumes, and so forth: perhaps it was inadvertently that Beratinsky so grossly neglected his guest.

The susceptible vanity of Reitzei had been deeply wounded before he entered; but now the cup of his wrath was filled to overflowing. The more champagne he drank—and there was plenty coming and going—the more sullen he became. For the rest, he had forgotten the circumstance that he had already drank two glasses of brandy before his arrival, and that he had eaten nothing since mid-day.

At length Beratinsky turned to him.

"Will you have a cigar, Reitzei?"

Reitzei's first impulse was to refuse to speak. But his wrongs forced him. He said, coldly—

"No, thanks. I have already been offered a cigar, by the gentleman next me. Perhaps you

will kindly tell me how one, being sober, had any need to pretend to be sober?"

Beratinsky stared at him.

"Oh, you are thinking about that yet, are you?" he said, indifferently; and, at this moment, as his neighbour called his attention to some further sketches, he again turned away.

But now the souls of the sons of the Fatherland, warmed with wine, began to think of home, and love, and patriotism; and longed for some more melodious utterances than this continuous guttural clatter. Silence was commanded. A handsome young fellow, slim and dark, clearly a Jew, ascended the platform, and sat down at the piano; the bashful Hempel, still blushing and laughing, was induced to follow; together they sang, amid comparative silence, a duet of Mendelssohn's, set for tenor and baritone; and sang it very well indeed. There was great applause; but Hempel insisted on retiring. Left to himself, the young man with the handsome profile and the finely set head played a few bars of prelude, and then, in a remarkably clear and resonant voice, sang Braga's mystical and tender Serenade —the "*Légende Valaque*"—amid a silence now

quite secured. But what was this one voice or that to all the passion of music demanding utterance? Soon there was a call to the young gentleman to play an accompaniment; and a huge, black-a-vised Hessian, still sitting at the table, held up his brimming glass, and began, in a voice like a hundred kettle-drums:

"Ich nehm' mein Gläschen in die Hand:"

Then came the universal shout of the chorus, ringing to the roof:

"Vive la Compagneia!"

Again the raucous voice bawled aloud—

"Und fahr' damit in's Unterland:"

And again the thunder of the chorus, this time prolonged; with much beating of time on the table, and jangling of wine-glasses.

"Vive la Compagneia!
Vive la, vive la, vive la, va! vive la, vive la, hopsasa!
"Vive la Compagneia!"

And so on to the end, the chorus becoming stormier and more thunderous than ever. Then, when peace had been restored, there was a general rising; though here and there a final

glass was drunk with "stosst an! setzt an! fertig! los!" and its attendant ceremonies. The meeting had broken up by common consent. There was a shuffling of footsteps and some disjointed talking and calling down the empty hall, where the lights were already being put out.

Reitzei had sat silent during all this chorus-singing; though ordinarily, being an excitable person, and indeed rather proud of his voice, he was ready to roar with any one. And in silence, too, he walked away with Beratinsky, who either was or appeared to be quite unconscious of his companion's state of mind. At length Reitzei stopped short—Oxford Street at this time of the morning was perfectly silent—and said—

"Beratinsky, I have a word to say to you."

"Very well," said the other; though he seemed surprised.

"I may tell you your manners are none of the best."

Beratinsky looked at him.

"Nor your temper," said he, "one would think. Do you still go back to what I said about your piece of acting? You are a child, Reitzei."

"I do not care about that," said Reitzei, contemptuously—though he was not speaking the truth: his self-satisfaction had been grievously hurt. "You put too great a value on your opinion, Beratinsky. It is not everything that you know about: we will let that pass. But when one goes into a society as a guest, one expects to be treated as a guest. No matter. I was among my own countrymen; I was well enough entertained."

"It appears so!" said Beratinsky, with a sneer. "I should say too well. My dear friend Reitzei, I am afraid you have been having a little too much champagne."

"It was none that you paid for, at all events," was the quick retort. "No matter. I was among my own countrymen; they are civil; they are not niggardly."

"They can afford to spend," said the other, laughing sardonically, "out of the plunder they take from others."

"They have fought for what they have," the other said, hotly. "Your countrymen: what have they ever done? Have they fought? No: they have conspired; and then run away."

But Beratinsky was much too cool-blooded a man to get into a quarrel of this kind. Besides, he noticed that Reitzei's speech was occasionally a little thick.

"I would advise you to go home and get to bed, friend Reitzei," said he.

"Not until I have said something to you, Mr. Beratinsky," said the other, with mock politeness. "I have this to say, that your ways of late have been a little too uncivil. You have been just rather too insolent, my good friend. Now I tell you frankly it does not do for one in your position to be uncivil and to make enemies."

"For one in my position!" Beratinsky repeated, in a tone of raillery.

"You think it is a joke, then, what happened to-night?"

"Oh, that is what you mean! But if that is my position, what other is yours, friend Reitzei?"

"You pretend not to know? I will tell you. That was got up between you and Lind. I had nothing to do with it."

"Ho! ho!"

"You may laugh; but take care you do not

laugh the other way," said the younger man, who had worked himself into a fury, and was all the madder on account of the cynical indifference of his antagonist. "I tell you I had nothing to do with it. It was your scheme, and Lind's. I did as I was bid. I tell you I could make this very plain if——"

He hesitated.

"Well—if what?" Beratinsky said, calmly.

"You know very well. I say you are not in a position to insult people and make enemies. You are a very clever man, in your own estimation, my friend Beratinsky; but I would give you the advice to be a little more civil."

Beratinsky regarded him for a second in silence.

"I scarcely know whether it is worth while to point out certain things to you, friend Reitzei, or whether to leave you to go home and sleep off your anger."

"My anger, as you call it, is not a thing of the moment. Oh, I assure you it has nothing to do with the champagne I have just drank, and which was not paid for by you, thank God! No; my anger—my wish to have you alter your manner a little—has been growing for some time;

but it is of late, my dear Beratinsky, that you have become more unbearable than ever."

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Reitzei. I at least am not going to stand in the streets talking nonsense at two in the morning. Good-night!"

He stepped from the pavement on to the street, to cross.

"Stop!" said Reitzei, seizing his arm with both hands.

Beratinsky shook him off violently; and turned. There might have been a blow; but Reitzei, who was a coward, shrank back.

Beratinsky advanced.

"Look here, Reitzei," he said, in a low voice. "I think you are sober enough to understand this. You were throwing out vague threats about what you might do or might not do. That means that you think you could go and tell something about the proceedings of to-night. You are a fool."

"Very well—very well."

"Perhaps you do not remember, for example, Clause I.—the very first clause—in the Obligations binding on Officers of the Second Degree. You do not remember that, perhaps?" He was now talking in a quietly contemptuous way; the little

spasm of anger that had disturbed him when Reitzei put his hands on his arm had immediately passed away. "The punishment for any one revealing, for any reason or purpose whatever, what has been done or is about to be done by orders of the Council or by any one acting under these orders—you remember the rest, my friend? The punishment is death. My good Reitzei, do not deprive me of the pleasure of your companionship. And do not imagine that you can force people to be polite to you by threats; that is not the way at all. Go home and sleep away your anger; and do not imagine that you have any advantage in your position; or that you are less responsible for what has been done than any one."

"I am not so sure about that," said Reitzei, sullenly.

"In the morning you will be sure," said the other, compassionately, as if he were talking to a child.

He held out his hand.

"Come, friend Reitzei," said he, with a sort of pitying kindness, "you will find in the morning it will be all right. What happened to-night was

well arranged, and well executed; everybody must be satisfied. And if you were a little too exuberant in your protestations, a little too anxious to accept the work yourself, and rather too demonstrative with your tremblings and your professions of courage and your clutching at the bottle: what then? Every one is not a born actor. Every one must make a mistake sometimes. But you won't take my hand?"

"Oh, Mr. Beratinsky," said the other, with profound scarcasm, "how could you expect it? Take the hand of one so wise as you, so great as you, such a logician as you are? It would be too much honour. But if you will allow me I will bid you good-night."

He turned abruptly, and left. Beratinsky stood for a moment or so, looking after him; then he burst into a fit of laughter, that sounded along the empty street. Reitzei heard the laughing, behind him.

CHAPTER IV.

A TWICE-TOLD TALE.

WHEN the door had closed on George Brand, Natalie stood for a second or two uncertain, to collect her bewildered thoughts. She heard his footsteps growing fainter and fainter; the world seemed to sway around her; life itself to be slipping away. Then suddenly she turned; and seized her mother by both her hands.

"Child, child, what is the matter?" the mother cried, terrified by the piteous eyes and white lips.

"Ah, you could not have guessed!" the girl said, wildly. "You could not have guessed, from his manner, what he has told me, could you? He is not one to say much. He is not one to complain. But he is about to lose his life, mother—to lose his life! And it is I who have led him to this; it is I who have killed him!"

"Natalie!" the mother exclaimed, turning rather pale. "You don't know what you are saying!"

"But it is true! Do not you understand, mother?" the girl said, despairingly. "The Society has given him some duty to do—now, at once; and it will cost him his life. Oh, do you think he complains?—no, he is not one to complain! He says it is nothing; he has pledged himself; he will obey; and what is the value of his one single life? That is the way he talks, mother! And the parting between him and me—that is so near, so near now—what is that, when there are thousands and thousands of such every time that war is declared? I am to make light of it, mother; I am to think it is nothing at all—that he should be going away to die!"

She had been talking quite wildly, almost incoherently; she had not observed that her mother had grown paler than ever. Nor had she heard the half-murmured exclamation of the elder woman—

"No, no—not the story twice told! He could not do that!"

Then, with an unusual firmness and decision,

she led her daughter to the easy-chair, and made her sit down.

"Natalie," she said, in earnest and grave tones, without any excitement whatever, "you have told me your father was very much against your marrying Mr. Brand."

There was no answer. The girl sitting there could only think of that terrible thing facing her in the immediate future.

"Natalie," said her mother, firmly. "I wish you to listen. You said your father was opposed to your marriage—that he would not hear of it. And you remember telling me how Mr. Brand had refused to hand over his property to the Society? And you talked of going to America, if Mr. Brand were sent. Natalie, this is your father's doing."

She looked up quickly, not understanding. The elder woman flushed slightly, but continued in clear and even tones.

"Perhaps I am wrong, Natalüshka; perhaps I should not teach you to suspect your father. But that is how I see it: this is what I believe—that Mr. Brand, if what you say is true, is to be sacrificed, not in the interests of the Society, but

because your father is determined to get him out of the way."

"Oh, mother, it is impossible! How could any one be so cruel!"

"It would be strange if the story were to be twice told," the mother said, absently. Then she took a stool beside her daughter; and sat down beside her; and took one of her hands in both hers. It was a reversal of their ordinary positions.

"Listen, Natalie; I am going to tell you a story," she said, with a curious resignation and sadness in her voice. "I had thought it might be unnecessary to tell it to you; when Mr. Brand spoke of it, I said no. But you will judge for yourself; and it will distract your mind for a little. You must think of a young girl something like yourself, Natalushka; not so handsome as you are; but a little pretty; and with many friends. Oh yes, many friends; for at that time the family were in very brilliant society and had large estates—alas! the estates were soon all lost in politics; and all that remained to the family was their name and some tales of what they had done. Well, this young lady, amongst all her friends, had one or two sweethearts, as

was natural; for there was a great coming and going then, before the troubles broke out; and many visitors at the house. Only every one thought she ought to marry her cousin Konrad; for they had been brought up together; and this cousin Konrad was a good-looking young man, and amiable, and her parents would have approved. Are you sure you are listening to my story, Natalushka?"

"Oh yes, mother," she said, in a low voice. "I think I understand."

"Well," continued the mother, with rather a sad smile, "you know that a girl does not always choose the one whom her friends choose for her. Among the two or three sweethearts—that is, those who wished to be sweethearts, do you understand, Natalushka—there was one who was more audacious, perhaps, more persistent, than the others; and then he was a man of great ambition, and of strong political views; and the young lady I was telling you about, Natalushka, had been brought up in a political atmosphere, and had opinions also. She believed this man was capable of doing great things; and her friends not objecting, she, after a few years of

waiting, owing to the troubles of political matters, married him!"

She was silent for a moment or two.

"Yes, they were married," she continued, with a sigh. "And for a time everything was happy; though the political affairs were so untoward, and cost much suffering and danger. The young wife only admired her husband's determined will, his audacity, his ambition after leadership and power. But in the midst of all this, as time went on, he began to grow jealous of the cousin Konrad; and Konrad, though he was a light-hearted young fellow, and meaning no harm whatever, resented being forbidden to see his cousin. He refused to cease visiting the house; though the young wife begged him to do so. He was very proud, and self-willed, you must know, Natalushka. Well, the husband did not say much; but he was morose; and once or twice he said to his wife, 'It is not your fault that your cousin is impertinent; but let him take care.' Then, one day, an old friend of the wife's father came to her and said: 'Do you know what has happened? You are not likely to see your cousin Konrad again. The Russian General

——, whom we bribed with twenty-four thousand roubles to give us ten passports for crossing the frontier, now refuses to give them; and Konrad has been sent to kill him, as a warning to the others. He will be taken, and hanged! I forgot to tell you, Natalushka, that the girl I am speaking of was in all the secrets of the association which had been started. You are more fortunate; you know nothing."

The interest of the listener had now been thoroughly aroused. She had turned towards her mother; and had put her remaining hand over hers.

"Well, this friend hinted something more. He hinted that it was the husband of this young wife who had sent Konrad on this mission; and that the means employed had not been quite fair."

"Mother! What do you mean!" Natalie said, breathlessly.

"I am telling you a story that really happened, Natalushka," said the mother, calmly, and with the same pathetic touch in her voice. "Then the young wife, without consideration, so anxious was she to save the life of her cousin, went straight to the highest authorities of the associa-

tion, and appealed to them. The influence of her family aided her. She was listened to; there was an examination; what the friend had hinted was found to be true; the commission was annulled; Konrad was given his liberty."

"Yes, yes!" said Natalie, eagerly.

"But listen, Natalushka; I said I would tell you the whole story; it has been kept from you for many a year. When it was found that the husband had made use of the machinery of the association for his own ends—which, it appears, was a great crime in their eyes—he was degraded; and forbidden all hope of joining the Council, the ruling body. He was in a terrible rage; for he was mad with ambition. He drove the wife from his house; rather, he left the house himself; and he took away with him their only child, a little girl, scarcely two years old; and he threatened the mother with the most terrible penalties if ever again she should speak to her own child. Natalushka—do you understand me? —do you wonder that my face is worn with grief? For sixteen years that mother, who loved her daughter better than anything in the world, was not permitted to speak to her—could only regard

her from a distance, and not tell her how she loved her."

The girl uttered a cry of compassion; and wound her arms round her mother's neck.

"Oh, the cruelty of it!—the cruelty of it, mother! But why did you not come to me? Do you think I would not have left everything to go with you—you, alone and suffering?"

For a time the mother could not answer; so deep were her sobs.

"Natalushka," she said, at length, in a broken voice, "no fear of any danger threatening myself would have kept me from you; be sure of that. But there was something else. My father had become compromised—the Austrians said it was assassination—it was not!" For a second some hot blood mounted to her cheeks. "I say it was a fair duel; and your grandfather himself was nearly killed; but he escaped, and got into hiding, among some faithful friends, poor people, who had known our family in better times. The Government did what they could to arrest him; he was expressly exempted from the amnesty—this old man, who was wounded, who was incapable of movement almost, whom every one

expected to die from day to day; and a word would have betrayed him and destroyed him. Can you wonder, Natalushka, with that threat hanging over me—that menace that the moment I spoke to you meant that my father would be delivered to his enemies—that I said, No, not yet will I speak to my little daughter. I cannot sacrifice my father's life even to the affection of a mother. But soon, when I have given him such care and solace as he has the right to demand from me, then I will set out to see my beautiful child—not with baskets of flowers, haunting the door-steps—not with a little trinket, to drop in her lap, and perhaps set her mind thinking—no, but with open arms and open heart—to see if she is not afraid to call me mother."

"Poor mother, how you must have suffered!" the girl murmured, holding her close to her bosom. "But with your powerful friends—those to whom you appealed before—why did you not go to them, and get safety from the terrible threat hanging over you? Could not they protect him, my grandfather, as they saved your cousin Konrad?"

"Alas! child, your grandfather never be-

longed to the association: of what use was he to them—a sufferer expecting each day to be his last, and not daring to move beyond the door of the peasant's cottage that sheltered him? Many a time he used to say to me: 'Natalie, go to your child. I am already dead; what matters it whether they take me or not? You have watched the old tree fade leaf by leaf; it is only the stump that cumbers the ground. Go to your child; if they try to drag me from here, the first mile will be the end; and what better can one wish for?' But no; I could not do that!"

Natalie had been thinking deeply. She raised her head; and regarded her mother with a calm, strange look.

"Mother," she said, slowly, "I do not think I will ever enter my father's house again."

The elder woman heard this declaration without either surprise or joy. She said, simply—

"Do not judge rashly, or harshly, Natalushka. Why have I refrained until now from telling you the story but that I thought it better—I thought you would be happier—if you continued to respect and love your father. Then consider what excuses may be made for him—— "

"None!" the girl said, vehemently. "To keep you, suffering, for sixteen years away from your only child; and with the knowledge that at any moment a word on his part might lead out your father to a cruel death—oh, mother, mother, you may ask me to forgive, but not to excuse!"

"Ambition — the desire for influence and leadership—is his very life," the mother said, calmly. "He cares more for that than anything in the world—wife, child, anything, he would sacrifice to it. But now, child," she said, with a concerned look, "can you understand why I have told you the story?"

Natalie looked up bewildered. For a time the interest of this story, intense as it had been to her, had distracted her mind from her own troubles; though all through she had been conscious of some impending gloom, that seemed to darken the life around her.

"It was not merely to tell you of my sufferings, Natalushka," the mother said at once, gently and anxiously. "They are over. I am happy to be beside you; if you are happy. But when a little time ago you told me of Mr. Brand being ordered

away to this duty, and of the fate likely to befall him, I said to myself, 'Ah, no; surely it cannot be the story told twice over. He would not dare to do that again.'"

The girl turned deadly pale.

"My child, that is why I asked you. Mr. Brand disappointed your father, I can see, about the money affair. Then, when he might have been got out of the way by being sent to America, [redacted] make matters worse than ever by threatening to go with him."

The girl did not speak; but her eyes were terrified.

"Natalie," the mother said, gently, "have I done wrong to put these suspicions into your mind? Have I done wrong to put you into antagonism with your father? My child, I cannot see you suffer without revealing to you what I imagine may be the cause—even if it is impossible to fight against it—even if one can only shudder at the cruelty of which some are capable. We can pray God to give us resignation——"

Natalie Lind was not listening at all. Her face was white; her lips firm; her eyes fixed.

"Mother," she said at length, in a low voice,

and speaking as if she were weighing each word, "if you think the story is being told again, why should it not be carried out? You appealed, to save the life of one who loved you. And I—why may not I also?"

"Oh, child, child!" the mother cried, in terror, laying hold of her arm. "Do not think of it! Anything but that! You do not know how terrible your father is when his anger is aroused: look at what I have suffered; Natalushka, I will not have you lead the life that I have led; you must not—you dare not—interfere!"

The girl put her hand aside, and sprang to her feet. No longer was she white of face. The blood of the Berezolyis was in her cheeks; her eyes were dilated; her voice was proud and indignant.

"And I," she said,—"if this is true—if this is possible—oh, do you think I am going to see a brave man sent to his death, shamelessly, cruelly, and not do what I can to save him? It is not for you, mother, it is not for one who bears the name that you bear, to tell me to be afraid. What have I to fear? What I did fear was to live—with him dead. Now——"

The mother had risen quickly to her feet also; and sought to hold her daughter's hands.

"For the sake of Heaven, Natalushka!" she pleaded. "You are running into a terrible danger——"

"Do I care, mother? Do I look as if I cared?" she said, proudly.

"And for no purpose, Natalushka. You will only bring down on yourself the fury of your father; and he will make your life as miserable as he has made mine. And what can you do, child? What can you do but bring ruin on yourself? You are powerless. You have no influence with those in authority, as I at one time had. You do not know them: how can you reach them?"

"You forget, mother," the girl said, triumphantly. "Was it not you yourself who asked me if I had ever heard of one Bartolotti?"

The mother uttered a slight cry of alarm.

"No, no, Natalushka, I beg of you——"

The girl took her mother in her arms and kissed her. There was a strange joy in her face. The eyes were no longer haggard; but full of light and hope.

"You dear mother," she said, as she gently

compelled her to be seated again, "that is the place for you. You will remain here, quiet, undisturbed by any fears; no one shall molest you; and when you have quite recovered from all your sufferings, and when your courage has returned to you, then I will come back and tell you my story. It is story for story, is it not?"

She rang the bell.

"Pardon me, dear mother; there is no time to be lost. For once I return to my father's house—yes, there is a card there that I must have——"

"But afterwards, child—where do you go?" the mother said, though she could scarcely find utterance.

"Why, to Naples, mother! I am an experienced traveller. I shall need no courier."

The blood had mounted into both cheek and forehead; her eyes were full of life and pride; even at such a moment the anxious, frightened mother was forced to think she had never seen her daughter look so beautiful.

The door opened.

"Madame, be so good as to tell Anneli that I am ready."

She turned to her mother.

"Now, mother, it is good-bye for I do not know how long."

"Oh no, it is not, child," said the other, trembling, and yet smiling in spite of all her fears. "If you are going to travel, you must have a courier. I will be your courier, Natalushka."

"You will come with me, mother?" she cried, with a happy surprise leaping to her face. "Come, then! We will give courage to each other, you and I, shall we not? Ah, dear mother, you have told me your story only in time; but we will go quickly now—you and I together!"

CHAPTER V.

SOUTHWARDS.

AFTER so much violent emotion the rapid and eager preparations for travel proved a useful distraction. There was no time to lose; and Natalie very speedily found that it was she herself who must undertake the duties of courier, her mother being far too anxious and alarmed. Once or twice, indeed, the girl, regarding the worn, sad face, almost repented of having accepted that impulsive offer, and would have proposed to start alone. But she knew that, left in solitude, the poor, distressed mother would only torture herself with imaginary fears. As for herself, she had no fear. Her heart was too full to have any room for fear.

And yet her hand trembled a little as she sat down to write these two messages of farewell. The first ran thus:—

"My Father,

"To-day, for the first time, I have heard my mother's story—from herself. I have looked into her eyes; I know she speaks the truth. You will not wonder then that I leave your house; that I go with her—there must be some one to try to console her for all she has suffered; and I am her daughter. I thank you for many years of kindness; and pray God to bless you.

"Natalie."

The next was easier to write.

"Dearest,

"My mother and I leave England to-night; do not ask why we go, or why I have not sent for you to come and say good-bye. We shall be away perhaps only a few days; in any case you must not go until we return. Do not forget that I must see you again.

"Natalie."

She felt happier when she had written these two notes. She rose from the table and went over to her mother.

"Now, mother, tell me how much money you have," she said, with a highly practical air.

"What, have I startled you, poor little mother? I believe your head is full of all kinds of strange forebodings; and yet they used to say that the Berezolyis were all of them very courageous."

"Natalushka, you do not know what danger you are rushing into," the mother said, absently.

"I again ask you, mother, a simple question: how much money have you?"

"I? I have thirty pounds or thereabouts, Natalie: that is my capital, as it were; but next month my cousins will send me——"

"Never mind about next month, mother dear. You must let me rob you of all your thirty pounds. And just to make sure I will go and borrow ten pounds more from Madame Potecki. Madame is not so very poor; she has savings; she would give me every farthing if I asked her. And do you think, little mother, if we come back successful—do you think there will be a great difficulty about paying back the loan to Madame Potecki?"

She was quite gay, to give her mother courage. And she refused to leave her alone, a prey to these gloomy forebodings. She carried her off with her in a cab, to Curzon Street, and

left her in the cab while she entered the house with Anneli. Anneli cried a little when she was receiving her mistress's last instructions.

"Am I never to see you again, Fräulein?" she sobbed. "Are you never coming back to the house any more?"

"Of course you will see me again, you foolish girl, even if I do not come back here. Now you will be careful, Anneli, to have the wine a little warmed, before dinner; and see that your master's slippers are in the study, by the fire; and the coffee—you must make the coffee yourself, Anneli——"

"Oh yes, indeed, Fräulein, I will make the coffee," said Anneli, with a fresh flowing of tears. "But—but may not I go with you, Fräulein?—if you are not coming back here any more, why may I not go with you? I am not anxious for wages, Fräulein—I do not want any wages at all—but if you will take me with you——"

"Now, do not be foolish, Anneli. Have you not a whole house to look after? There, take these keys. You will have to show that you can be a good house-mistress; and sensible; and not childish."

At the door she shook hands with the sobbing maid, and bade her a cheerful good-bye. Then she got into the cab and drove away to Madame Potecki's lodgings. Finally, by dexterous management, she succeeded in getting her mother and herself to Charing Cross Station in time to catch the afternoon express to Dover.

It is probable that, now the first excitement of setting out was over, and the two women-folk left to themselves in the solitude of a compartment, Natalie might have begun to reflect with some tremor of the heart on the very vagueness of the task she had undertaken. But she was not permitted to do so. The necessity of driving away her mother's forebodings prevented her indulging in any of her own. She was forced to be careless, cheerful, matter-of-fact.

"Natalushka," the mother said, holding her daughter's hand, "you have been brought up in ignorance. You know only the romantic, the beautiful side of what is going on; you do not know what these men are ready to do—what has been done—to secure the success of their schemes. And for you, a girl, to interfere—it is madness Natalushka. They will laugh at you, perhaps;

perhaps it may be worse—they may resent your interference, and ask who has betrayed their secrets."

"Are they so very terrible, then?" said the girl, with a smile, "when Lord Evelyn—ah, you do not know him yet, mother; but he is as gentle as a woman—when he is their friend; and when Mr. Brand is full of admiration for what they are doing; and when Calabressa—now, mother, is Calabressa likely to harm any one? And it was Calabressa himself who said to me, 'Little daughter, if ever you are in great trouble, go to Naples. You will find friends there.' No, mother, it is no use your trying to frighten me. No; let us talk about something sensible. For example, which way is the wind?"

"How can I tell, Natalushka?"

The girl laughed—rather a forced laugh, perhaps; she could not altogether shake off the consciousness of the peril that surrounded her lover.

"Why, mother, you are a pretty courier! You are about to cross the Channel; and you do not know which way the wind is; or whether the sea is rough; or anything. Now I will tell you; it

is I who am the courier. The wind is north-east; the sea was quite smooth yesterday evening; I think we shall have a comfortable passage. And do you know why I have brought you away by this train? Don't you know that I shall get you down to Dover in time to give you something nice for dinner; then, if the sea is quite smooth, we go on board before the people come; then we cross over to Calais, and go to a hotel there; then you get a good, long, sound sleep, you little mother, and the next day—that is to-morrow—about noon, I think, we go easily on to Paris. What do you think of that, now?"

"Whatever you do will be right, Natalushka. You know I have never before had a daughter to look after me."

Natalie's programme was fulfilled to the letter, and with good fortune. They dined in the hotel; had some tea; and then went down through the dark clear night to the packet. The sea was like a mill-pond; there was just sufficient motion of the water to make the reflections of the stars quiver in the dark. The two women sat together on deck; and as the steamer gradually took them away from the lights of the English coast, Natalie

hummed to her mother, in a low voice, some verses of an old Magyar song, which were scarcely audible amid the rush of water and the throbbing of the paddles.

Next day the long and tedious railway journey began; and here again Natalie acted as the most indefatigable and accomplished of couriers.

"How do you manage it, Natalushka?" said the mother, as she got into the *coupé*, to this tall and handsome young lady who was standing outside, and on whom everybody seemed to wait. "You get everything you want; and without trouble."

"It is only practice, with a little patience," she said, simply, as she opened her flask of white-rose scent and handed it up to her mother.

Necessarily it was rail all the way for these two travellers. Not for them the joyous assembling on the Mediterranean shore, where Nice lies basking in the sun like a pink surf thrown up by the waves. Not for them the packing of the great carriage; and the swinging away of the four horses with their jingling bells; and the slow climbing of the Cornice, the road twisting up the face of the grey mountains, through perpetual lemon-groves, with far below the ribbed blue sea.

Not for them the leisurely trotting all day long through the luxuriant beauty of the Riviera—the sun hot on the ruddy cliffs of granite, and on the terraces of figs and vines and spreading palms; nor the rattling through the narrow streets of the old walled towns, with the scarlet-capped men and swarthy-visaged women shrinking into the doorways as the horses clatter by; nor the quiet evenings in the hotel garden, with the moon rising over the murmuring sea, and the air sweet with the perfumes of the south. No. They climbed a mountain, it is true; but it was behind an engine: they beheld the Mont Cenis snows; but it was from the window of a railway-carriage. Then they passed through the black, resounding tunnel, with, after a time, its sudden glares of light; finally the world seemed to open around them: they looked down upon Italy.

"Many a one has died for you—and been glad," said the girl, almost to herself, as she gazed abroad on the great valleys, with here and there a peak crowned with a castle or a convent, with the vine-terraced hills showing now and again a few white dots of houses, and beyond and above all these the far blue mountains with their sharp line of snow.

Then they descended and passed through the luxuriant yellow plains—the sunset blazing on the rows of willows and on the square farm-houses with their gaudy picture over the arched gateway; while always in the background rose the dark masses of the mountains, solemn and distant, beyond the golden glow of the fields. They reached Turin at dusk, both of them very tired.

So far scarcely anything had been said about the object of their journey, though they could have talked in safety even in railway-carriages, as they spoke to each other in Magyar. But Natalie refused to listen to any dissuading counsel; when her mother began, she would say, "Dear little mother, will you have some white rose for your forehead and your fingers?"

From Turin they had to start again early in the morning. They had by this time grown quite accustomed to the plod, plodding of the train; it seemed almost one of the normal and necessary conditions of life. They went down by Genoa, Spezia, Pisa, and Rome; making the shortest possible pauses.

One night the windows of a sitting-room in a hotel at the western end of Naples were opened; and a young girl stepped out on to the high balcony, a light shawl thrown over her head and shoulders. It was a beautiful night; the air sweet and still; the moonlight shining over the scarcely stirring waters of the bay. Before her rose the vast bulk of the Castello dell' Ovo; a huge mass of black shadow against the silvery sea and the lambent sky; then far away throbbed the dull orange lights of the city; and beyond these again Vesuvius towered into the clear darkness, with a line of sharp, intense crimson marking its summit. Through the perfect silence she could hear the sound of the oars of a boat, itself unseen; and over the whispering waters came some faint and distant refrain—"*Addio!—addio!*" At length even these sounds ceased; and she was alone in the still, murmuring, beautiful night.

She looked across to the great city. Who were her unknown friends there? What mighty power was she about to invoke on the morrow? There was no need for her to consult the card that Calabressa had given her; again and again,

in the night-time, when her mother lay asleep, she had studied it, and wondered whether it would prove the talisman the giver had called it. She looked at this great city beside the sea; and only knew that it was beautiful in the moonlight; she had no fear of anything that it contained. And then she thought of another city, far away in the colder north; and she wondered if a certain window were open there, overlooking the river and the gas-lamps and the bridges; and whether there was one there thinking of her. Could not the night-wind carry the speech and desire of her heart?—"*Good night, good night . . . Love knows no fear . . . Not yet is our life for ever broken for us.*"

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEECHES.

On the same night Lord Evelyn was in Brand's rooms, arguing, expostulating, entreating, all to no purpose. He was astounded at the calmness with which this man appeared to accept the terrible task imposed on him, and at the stoical indifference with which he looked forward to the almost certain sacrifice of his own life.

"You have become a fanatic of fanatics!" he exclaimed, indignantly.

George Brand was staring out of the windows into the dark night, somewhat absently.

"I suppose," he answered, "all the great things that have been done in the world have been founded in fanaticism. All that I can hope for now is that this particular act of the Council may have the good effect they anticipate. They ought to know. They see the sort of people with whom they have to deal. I should

have thought, with Lind, that it was unwise—that it would shock, or even terrify; but my opinion is neither here nor there. Further talking is of no use, Evelyn; the thing is settled; what I have to consider now, as regards myself, is how I can best benefit a few people whom I am interested in; and you can help me in that."

"But I appeal to yourself—to your conscience!" Lord Evelyn cried, almost in despair. "You cannot shift the responsibility to them. You are answerable for your own actions. I say you are sacrificing your conscience to your pride. You are saying to yourself, 'Do these foreigners think that I am afraid?'"

"I am not thinking of myself at all," said Brand, simply. "That is all over. When I swore to give myself to this Society—to obey the commands of the Council—then my responsibility ceased. What I have to do is to be faithful to my oath—and to the promise I have made." Almost unconsciously he glanced at the ring that Natalie had given him. "You would not have me skulk back, like a coward? You would not have me 'play and not pay'? What I have undertaken to do, I will do."

Presently he added—

"There is something you could do, Evelyn. Don't let us talk further of myself: I said before, if a single man drops out of the ranks, what matter?—the army marches on. And what has been concerning me of late is the effect that this act of the Council may have on our thousands of friends throughout this country. Now, Evelyn, when—when the affair comes off—I think you would do a great deal of good by pointing out in the papers what a scoundrel this man Zaccatelli was; how he had merited his punishment; and how it might seem justifiable to the people over there that one should take the law into one's own hands in such an exceptional case. You might do that, Evelyn, for the sake of the Society. The people over here don't know what a ruffian he is; and how he is beyond the ordinary reach of the law; or how the poor people have groaned under his iniquities. Don't seek to justify me; I shall be beyond the reach of excuse, or execration, by that time; but you might break the shock, don't you see?—you might explain a little—you might intimate to our friends who have joined us here that they had not joined any

kind of Camorra association. That troubles me more than anything. I confess to you that I have got quite reconciled to the affair, as far as any sacrifice on my own part is concerned. That bitterness is over. I can even think of Natalie."

The last words were spoken slowly, and in a low voice; his eyes were fixed on the night-world outside. What could his friend say? They talked late into the night; but all his remonstrances and prayers were of no avail as against this clear resolve.

"What is the use of discussion?" was the placid answer. "What would you have me do? Break my oaths—put aside my sacred promise made to Natalie—and give up the Society altogether? My good fellow, let us talk of something less impossible."

And indeed, though he deprecated discussion on this point, he was anxious to talk. The fact was that of late he had come to fear sleep—as the look of his eyes testified. In the daytime, or as long as he could sit up with a companion, he could force himself to think only of the immediate and practical demands of the hour; vain regrets

over what might have been—and even occasional uneasy searchings of conscience—he could by an effort of will ignore. He had accepted his fate; he had schooled himself to look forward to it without fear; henceforth there was to be no indecision, no murmur of complaint. But in the night-time—in dreams—the natural craving for life asserted itself: it seemed so sad to bid good-bye for ever to those whom he had known and loved; and mostly always it was Natalie herself who stood there, regarding him with streaming eyes, and wringing her hands, and sobbing to him farewell. The morning light, or the first calls in the thoroughfare below, or the shrieking of some railway-whistle on Hungerford Bridge, brought an inexpressible relief by banishing these agonizing visions. No matter how soon Waters was astir, he found his master up before him—dressed, and walking up and down the room, or reading some evening newspaper of the previous day. Sometimes Brand occupied himself in getting ready his own breakfast; but he had to explain to Waters that this was not meant as a rebuke; it was merely that, being awake early, he wished for some occupation.

Early on the morning after this last despairing protest on the part of Lord Evelyn, Brand drove up to Paddington Station, on his way to pay a hurried visit to his Buckinghamshire home. Nearly all his affairs had been settled in town; there remained some arrangements to be made in the country. Lord Evelyn was to have joined him in this excursion; but at the last moment had not put in an appearance; so Brand jumped in just as the train was starting; and found himself alone in the carriage.

The bundle of newspapers he had with him did not seem to interest him much. He was more than ever puzzled to account for the continued silence of Natalie. Each morning he had been confidently expecting to hear from her—to have some explanation of her sudden departure; but as the days went by, and no message of any sort arrived, his wonder became merged in anxiety. It seemed so strange that she should thus absent herself, when she had been counting on each day on which she might see him as if it were some gracious gift from Heaven.

All that he was certain of in the matter was that Lind knew no more than himself as to

where Natalie had gone. One afternoon, going out from his rooms into Buckingham Street, he caught sight of Beratinsky loitering about further up the little thoroughfare, about the corner of John Street. Beratinsky's back was turned to him; and so he took advantage of the moment to open the gate, for which he had a private key, leading down to the old York Gate. From thence he made his way round by Villiers Street, whence he could get a better view of the little black-a-vised Pole's proceedings.

He speedily convinced himself that Beratinsky, though occasionally he walked along in the direction of Adam Street, and though sometimes he would leisurely stroll up to the Strand, was in reality keeping an eye on Buckingham Street; and he had not the least doubt that he himself was the object of this surveillance. He laughed to himself. Had these wise people in Lisle Street, then, discovering that Natalie's mother was in London, arrived at the conclusion that she and her daughter had taken refuge in so very open a place of shelter? When Beratinsky was least expecting any such encounter, Brand went up and tapped him on the shoulder.

"How do you do, Mr. Beratinsky?" said he, when the other had wheeled round. "This is not the most agreeable place for a stroll. Why do you not go down to the Embankment Gardens?"

Beratinsky was angry and confused; but did not quite lose his self-command.

"I am waiting for some one," he said, curtly.

"Or to find out about some one? Well, I will save you some trouble. Lind wishes to know where his wife and daughter are, I imagine."

"Is that unnatural?"

"I suppose not. I heard he had been down to Hans Place, where Madame Lind was staying."

"You knew, then?" the other said, quickly.

"Oh yes, I knew. Now, if you will be frank with me, I may be of some assistance to you. Lind does not know where his wife and daughter are?"

"You know he does not."

"And you—perhaps you fancied that one or other might be sending a message to me—might call, perhaps—or even that I might have got them rooms for the time being?"

The Englishman's penetrating grey eyes were difficult to avoid.

"You appear to know a good deal, Mr. Brand," Beratinsky said, somewhat sulkily. "Perhaps you can tell me where they are now."

"I can tell you where they are not—and that is in London."

The other looked surprised—then suspicious.

"Oh, believe me or not as you please. I only wish to save you trouble. I tell you that, to the best of my belief, Miss Lind and her mother are not in London—nor in this country even."

"How do you know?"

"Pardon me—you are going too far. I only tell you what I believe. In return, as I have saved you some trouble, I shall expect you to let me know if you hear anything about them. Is that too much to ask?"

"Then you really don't know where they are?" Beratinsky said, with a quick glance.

"I do not. But they have left London—that I do know."

"I am very much obliged to you," said the other, more humbly. "I wish you good evening, Mr. Brand."

"Stay a moment. Can you tell me what Yacov Kirski's address is? I have something to arrange with him before I leave England."

He took out his note-book, and put down the address that Beratinsky gave him. Then the latter moved away, taking off his hat politely, but not shaking hands.

Brand was amused rather than surprised at this little adventure; but when day after day passed, and no tidings came from Natalie, he grew alarmed. Each morning he was certain there would be a letter; each morning the postman rang the bell below, and Waters would tumble down the stairs at break-neck speed, but not a word came from Natalie or her mother.

At the little Buckinghamshire station at which he stopped he found a dog-cart waiting to convey him to Hill Beeches; and speedily he was driving away through the country he knew so well—now somewhat desolate in the faded tints of the waning of the year. And perhaps, as he drew near to the red and white house on the side of the hill, he began to reproach himself that he had not made the place more his home. Though the grounds and shrubberies were neat and trim

enough, there was a neglected look about the house itself. When he entered, his footsteps rang hollow on uncarpeted floors. Chintz covered the furniture; muslin smothered the chandeliers; everything seemed to be locked up and put away. And this comely woman of sixty or so who came forward to meet him—a smiling, gracious dame, with silvery-white hair, and peach-like cheeks, and the most winning little laugh: was not her first word some hint to the young master that he had been a long time away, and how the neighbours were many a time asking her when a young mistress was coming to the Beeches, to keep the place as it used to be kept in the olden days?

"Ah, well, sir, you know how the people do talk," she said, with an apologetic smile. "And there was Mrs. Diggles, sir, that is at the Chequers, sir, and she was speaking only the other day as it might be about the old oak cupboard that you remember, sir, and she was saying, 'Well, I wouldn't give that cupboard to Masther Brand, though he offered me twenty pound for it years ago—twenty pound, not a farthing less. My vather he gave me that cup-

board when I was married; and ten shillings was what he paid for it; and then there was twenty-five shillings paid for putting that cupboard to rights. And then the wet day that Mahster Brand was out shooting; and the Chequers that crowded that I had to ask him and the other gentlemen to go into my own room; and what does he say but, "Mrs. Diggles, I will give you twenty pound for that cupboard of yourn, once you knock off the feet and the curly bit on the top." Law, how the gentle-folk do know about sech things: that was exactly what my vather he paid the twenty-five shillings for. But how could I give him my cupboard for twenty pound, when I had promised it to my nephew? When I'm taken, that cupboard my nephew shall have.' Well, sir, the people do say that Mrs. Diggles and her nephew have had a quarrel; and this was what she was saying to me, begging your pardon, sir, only the other day as it might be, says she, 'Mrs. Alleyne, this is what I will do: when your young mahster brings home a wife to the Beeches, I will make his lady a wedding-present of that cupboard of mine—that I will, if so be as she is not too proud to accept it from one in my

'umble station. It will be a wedding-present; and the sooner the better,' says she, begging of your pardon, sir."

"It is very kind of her, Mrs. Alleyne. Now let me have the keys, if you please. I have one or two things to see to; and I will not detain you now."

She handed him the keys and accepted her dismissal gratefully, for she was anxious to get off and see about luncheon. Then Brand proceeded to stroll quietly, and perhaps even sadly, through the empty and resounding rooms, that had for him many memories.

It was a rambling, old-fashioned, oddly built house, that had been added on to by successive generations according to their needs, without much reference to the original design. It had come into the possession of the Brands of Darlington by marriage; George Brand's grandfather having married a certain Lady Mary Heaton, the last representative of an old and famous family. And these lonely rooms that he now walked through—remarking here and there what prominence had been given by his mother to the many trophies of the chase that he himself

had sent home from various parts of the world—were hung chiefly with portraits, whose costumes ranged from the stiff frill and peaked waist of Elizabeth to the low neck and ringleted hair of Victoria. But there was in an inner room which he entered another collection of portraits that seemed to have a peculiar fascination for him—a series of miniatures of various members of the Heaton and Brand families, reaching down even to himself, for the last that was added had been one taken when he was a lad, to send to his mother, then lying dangerously ill at Cannes. There was her own portrait, too—that of a delicate-looking woman, with large, lustrous, soft eyes, and wan cheeks, who had that peculiar tenderness and sweetness of expression that frequently accompanies consumption. He sat looking at these various portraits a long time, wondering now and again what this or that one may have suffered or rejoiced in; but more than all he lingered over the last—as if to bid those beautiful, tender eyes a final farewell.

He was startled by the sound of some vehicle rattling over the gravel outside; then he heard some one come walking through the echoing

rooms. Instantly—he scarcely knew why—he shut down the lid of the case in front of him.

"Missed the train by just a second," Lord Evelyn said, coming into the room. "I am awfully sorry."

"It doesn't matter," Brand answered. "But I am glad you have come. I have everything squared up in London, I think; there only remains to settle a few things down here."

He spoke in quite a matter-of-fact way—so much so that his friend forgot to utter any further and unavailing protest.

"You know I am supposed to be going away abroad for a long time," he continued. "You must take my place, Evelyn, in a sort of way; and I will introduce you to-day to the people you must look after. There is a grandson of my mother's nurse, for example; I promised to do something for him when he completed his apprenticeship. And two old ladies who have seen better days: they are not supposed to accept any help; but you can make wonderful discoveries about the value of their old china, and carry it off to Bond Street. I will leave you plenty of funds; before my nephew comes into the place,

there will be sufficient for him and to spare. But as for yourself, Evelyn, I want you to take some little souvenir—how about this?"

He went and fetched a curious old silver drinking-cup, set round the lip and down the handle with uncut rubies and sapphires.

"I don't like the notion of the thing at all," Lord Evelyn said, rather gloomily; but it was not the cup that he was refusing thus ungraciously.

"After a time people will give me up for lost; and I have left you ample power to give any one you can think of some little present, don't you know, as a memento—whatever strikes your own fancy. I want Natalie to have that Louis XV. table over there—people rather admire the inlaid work on it, and the devices inside are endless. However, we will make out a list of these things afterwards. Will you drive with me down to the village now? I want you to see my pensioners."

"All right—if you like," Lord Evelyn said; though his heart was not in the work.

He walked out of this little room and made his way to the front door, fancying that Brand

would immediately follow. But Brand returned to that room; and opened the case of miniatures. Then he took from his pocket a little parcel, and unrolled it; it was a portrait of Natalie—a photograph on porcelain, most delicately coloured, and surrounded with an antique silver frame. He gazed for a minute or two at the beautiful face; and somehow the eyes seemed sad to him. Then he placed the little portrait—which itself looked like a miniature—next the miniature of his mother; and shut the case and locked it.

"I beg your pardon, Evelyn, for keeping you waiting," he said, at the front door. "Will you particularly remember this—that none of the portraits here are to be disturbed, on any account whatever?"

CHAPTER VII.

AT PORTICI.

NATALIE slept far from soundly the first night after her arrival in Naples; she was glad when the slow, anxious hours, with all their bewildering uncertainties and forebodings, were over. She rose early, and dressed quickly; she threw open the tall French windows to let in the soft silken air from the sea; then she stepped out on to the balcony to marvel once more—she who knew Naples well enough—at the shining beauty around her.

It was a morning to give courage to any one; the air was fresh and sweet; she drank deep of the abundant gladness and brightness of the world. The great plain of waters before her shimmered and sparkled in millions of diamonds; with here and there long splashes of sunny green, and here and there long splashes of purple where the sea-

weed showed through. The waves sprang white on the projecting walls of the Castello dell' Ovo; and washed in on the shore with a soft continuous murmur; the brown-sailed fishing-boats went by, showing black or red as they happened to be in sunshine or shadow. Then far away beyond the shining sea the island of Capri lay like a blue cloud on the horizon; and far away beyond the now awakening city near her rose Vesuvius, the twin peaks dark under some swathes of cloud, the sunlight touching the lower slopes into a yellowish green, and shining on the pink fringe of villas along the shore. On so fair and bright a morning hope came as natural to her as singing to a bird. The fears of the night were over; she could not be afraid of what such a day should bring forth.

And yet—and yet—from time to time—and just for a second or so—her heart seemed to stand still. And she was so silent and preoccupied at breakfast, that her mother remarked it; and Natàlie had to excuse herself by saying that she was a little tired with the travelling. After breakfast, she led her mother into the reading-room, and said, in rather an excited way—

"Now, mother, here is a treat for you. You will get all the English papers here; and all the news."

"You forget, Natalie," said her mother, smiling, "that English papers are not of much use to me."

"Ah, well, the foreign papers," she said, quickly. "You see, mother, I want to go along to a chemist's to get some white-rose."

"You should not throw it about the railway carriages so much, Natalushka," the unsuspecting mother said, reprovingly. "You are extravagant."

She did not heed.

"Perhaps they will have it in Naples. Wait until I come back, mother; I shall not be long."

But it was not any white-rose scent that was in her mind as she went rapidly away and got ready to go out; and it was not in search of any chemist's shop that she made her way to the Via Roma. Why, she had asked herself that morning, as she stood on the balcony, and drank in the sunlight and the sweet air, should she take the poor tired mother with her on this adventure? If there was danger, she would brave it by herself.

She walked quickly—perhaps anxious to make the first plunge.

She had no difficulty in finding the Vico Carlo —though it was one of the narrowest and steepest of the small, narrow, and steep lanes leading off the main thoroughfare into the masses of tall and closely built houses on the side of the hill. But when she looked up and recognized the little plate bearing the name at the corner, she turned a little pale: something—she knew not what—was now so near.

And as she turned into this narrow and squalid little alley, it seemed as if her eyes, through some excitement or other, observed the objects around her with a strange intensity. She could remember each and every one of them afterwards—the fruit-sellers bawling, and the sellers of acidulated drinks out-roaring them; the shoemakers already at work at their open stalls; mules laden with vegetables; a negro monk with his black woolly head above the brown hood; a venerable letter-writer at a small table, spectacles on nose and pen in hand, with two women whispering to him what he was to write for them. She made her way up the steep lane, through the busy, motley, mal-

odorous crowd, until she reached the corner pointed out to her by Calabressa.

But he had not told her which way to turn; and for a second or two she stood in the middle of the crossing, uncertain and bewildered. A brawny-looking fellow, apparently a butcher, addressed her; she murmured some thanks, and hastily turned away, taking to the right. She had not gone but a few yards when she saw the entrance to a court which, at least, was certainly as dark as that described by Calabressa. She was half afraid that the man who had spoken to her was following her; and so, without further hesitation, she plunged into this gloomy courtyard, which was apparently quite deserted.

She was alone; and she looked around. A second convinced her that she had hit upon the place, as it were by accident. Over her head swung an oil-lamp, that threw but the scantiest orange light into the vague shadows of the place; and in front of her were the open door and windows of what was apparently a wine-shop. She did not stay to reflect. Perhaps with some little tightening of the mouth—unknown to herself—she walked forward and entered the vaults.

Here, again, no one was visible. There were rows of tuns, certainly, and a musty odour in the place; but no sign of any trade or business being carried on. Suddenly, out of the darkness, appeared a figure—so suddenly indeed as to startle her. Had this man been seen in ordinary daylight, he would no doubt have looked nothing worse than a familiar type of the fat, black-a-vised Italian—not a very comely person, it is true, but not in any way horrible. But now these dusky shadows lent something ghoulish-looking to his bushy head and greasy face and sparkling black eyes.

"What is the pleasure of the young lady?" he said, curtly.

Natalie had been startled.

"I wished to enquire—I wished to mention," she stammered—"one Bartolotti."

But at the same time she was conscious of a strange sinking of the heart. Was this the sort of creature who was expected to save the life of her lover?—this the sort of man to pit against Ferdinand Lind? Poor old Calabressa—she thought—he meant well; but he boasted—he was foolish.

This heavy-faced and heavy-bodied man in

the dusk did not reply at once. He turned aside, saying—

"Excuse me, signorina, it is dark here. They have neglected to light the lamps as yet."

Then, with much composure, he got a lamp, struck a match, and lit it. The light was not great; but he placed it deliberately so that it shone on Natalie; and then he calmly investigated her appearance.

"Yes, signorina, you mentioned one Bartolotti," he remarked, in a more respectful tone.

Natalie hesitated. According to Calabressa's account, the mere mention of the name was to act as a talisman which would work wonders for her. This obese person merely stood there, awaiting what she should say.

"Perhaps," she said, in great embarrassment, "you know one Calabressa?"

"Ah, Calabressa?" he said, and the dull face lighted up with a little more intelligence. "Yes, of course. One knows Calabressa."

"He is a friend of mine," she said. "Perhaps, if I could see him—he would explain to you——"

"But Calabressa is not here. He is not even in this country, perhaps."

Then silence. A sort of terror seized her. Was this the end of all her hopes? Was she to go away—thus? Then came a sudden cry, wrung from her despair.

"Oh, sir, you must tell me if there is no one who can help me! I have come to save one who is in trouble, in danger. Calabressa said to me, 'Go to Naples; go to such and such a place; the mere word Bartolotti will give you powerful friends; count on them; they will not fail one who belongs to the Berezolyis.' And now——"

"Your pardon, signorina; have the complaisance to repeat the name."

"Berezolyi," she answered, quickly; "he said it would be known."

"I for my own part do not know it; but that is of no consequence," said the man. "I begin to perceive what it is that you demand. It is serious; I hope my friend Calabressa is justified. I have but to do my duty."

Then he glanced again at the young lady—or rather, at her costume.

"The assistance you demand for some one, signorina: is it a sum of money—is it a reasonable, ordinary sum of money that would be in the question perhaps?"

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"Oh no, signore; not at all!"

"Very well. Then have the kindness to write your name and your address for me: I will convey your appeal."

He brought her writing materials; after a moment's consideration she wrote — "*Natalie Lind, the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi. Hotel* ——." She handed him the paper.

"A thousand thanks, signorina. To-day, perhaps to-morrow, you will hear from the friends of Calabressa. You will be ready to go where they ask you to go?"

"Oh yes, yes, sir!" she exclaimed. "How can I thank you?"

"It is unnecessary," he said, taking the lamp to show her the way more clearly. "I have the honour to wish you good morning, signorina." And again he bowed respectfully. "Your most humble servant, signorina."

She returned to the hotel; and found that her mother had gone upstairs to her own room.

"Natalushka, you have been away trying to find some one."

"Yes, mother," the girl said, rather sadly.

"Why did you go alone?"

"I thought I would not tire you, dear mother."

Then she described all the circumstances of her morning's visit.

"But why should you be so sad, Natalushka?" the mother said, taking her daughter's hand. "Don't you know that fine palaces may have rusty keys? Oh, I can reassure you on that point. You will not have to deal with persons like your friend the wine-merchant—not at all. I know at least as much as that, child. But, you see, they have to guard themselves."

Natalie would not leave the hotel for a moment. She pretended to read; but every person who came into the reading-room caused her to look up with a start of apprehensive enquiry. At last there came a note to her. She broke open the envelope hurriedly, and found a plain white card, with these words written on it—

"*Be at the Villa Odelschalchi, Portici, at four this afternoon.*"

Joy leapt to her face again.

"Mother, look!" she cried, eagerly. "After all, we may hope?"

"This time you shall not go alone, Natalushka."

"Why not, mother? I am not afraid."

"I may be of use to you, child. There may be friends of mine there—who knows? I am going with you."

In course of time they hired a carriage, and drove away through the crowded and gaily coloured city in the glow of the afternoon. But they had sufficient prudence, before reaching Portici, to descend from the carriage, and proceed on foot. They walked quietly along, apparently not much interested in what was around them. Presently Natalie pressed her mother's arm; they were opposite the Villa Odelschalchi—there was the name on the flat pillars by the gate.

This great plain building, which might have been called a palazzo rather then a villa, seemed, on the side fronting the street, to be entirely closed; all the casements of the windows being shut. But when they crossed to the gate, and pulled the big iron handle that set a bell ringing, a porter appeared—a big, indolent-looking man, who regarded them calmly, to see which would speak first.

Natalie simply produced the card that had been sent to her.

"This is the Villa Odelschalchi, I perceive," she said.

"Oh, it is you, then, signorina?" the porter said, with great respect. "Yes, there was one lady to come here at four o'clock——"

"But the signora is my mother," said Natalie, perhaps with a trifle of impatience.

The man hesitated for a moment; but by this time Natalie, accompanied by her mother, had passed through the cool grey archway into the spacious tesselated court from which rose on each hand a wide marble staircase.

"Will the signorina and the signora her mother condescend to follow me?" the porter said, leading the way up one of the staircases, the big iron keys still in his hand.

They were shown into an ante-chamber, but scantily furnished; and the porter disappeared. In a minute or two there came into the room a small, sallow-complexioned man—who was no other than the Secretary Granaglia. He bowed; and as he did so glanced from the one to the other of the visitors with scrutiny.

"It is no doubt correct, signorina," said he, addressing himself to Natalie, "that you have

brought the signora your mother with you. We had thought you were alone—from the message we received. No matter; only"—and here he turned to Natalie's mother—"only, signora, you will renew your acquaintance with one who wishes to be known by the name of Von Zoesch. I have no doubt the signora understands."

"Oh, perfectly, perfectly," said the elder woman; she had been familiar with these prudent changes of name all her life.

The Secretary Granaglia bowed and retired.

"It is some one who knows you, mother?" Natalie said, breathlessly.

"Oh, I hope so!" the other answered. She was a little pale, and her fingers were tightly clasped.

Then a heavier step was heard in the empty corridors outside. The door was opened; there appeared a tall and soldierly-looking man, about six feet three in height and perfectly erect, with closely cropped white hair, a long white moustache, a reddish face, and clear, piercing, light-blue eyes. The moment the elder woman saw him, she uttered a slight cry—of joy, it seemed, and surprise—and sprang to her feet.

"Stefan!"

"Natalie!" he exclaimed in turn, with an almost boyish laugh of pleasure; and he came forward to her with both hands outstretched, and took hers. "Why, what good wind has brought you to this country? But I beg a thousand pardons——"

He turned and glanced at Natalie.

"My child," she said, "let me present you to my old friend, General——"

"Von Zoesch," he interrupted; and he took Natalie's hand at the same time. "What, you are the young lady, then, who bearded the lion in his den this morning? And you were not afraid? No; I can see you are a Berezolyi; if you were a man you would be for ever getting yourself and your friends into scrapes, and risking your neck to get them out again. A Berezolyi, truly! 'The more beautiful daughter of a beautiful mother;' but the little scamp knew his insulting iambics were only fit to be thrown into the fire, when he made that unjust comparison. Ah, you young people have fresh complexions and bright eyes on your side; but we old people prefer our old friends."

"I hope so, sir," said Natalie, with her eyes bent down.

"And had your father no other messenger that he must employ you?" said this erect, white-haired giant, who regarded her in a kindly way. "Or is it that feather-brained fellow Calabressa who has got you to intercede for him? Rest assured. Calabressa will soon be in imminent peril of being laid by the heels; and he is therefore supremely happy."

Before the girl could speak he had turned to the mother.

"Come, my old friend, shall we go out into the garden? I am sorry the reception-rooms in the Villa are all dismantled; in truth, we are only temporary lodgers. And I have a great many questions to ask you about old friends—particularly your father."

"Stefan, can you not understand why I have permitted myself to leave Hungary?"

He glanced at her deep mourning.

"Ah, is that so? Well, no one ever lived a braver life. And how he kept up the old Hungarian traditions!—the house a hotel from month's end to month's end: no questions asked,

but 'Are you a stranger? Then my house is yours.'"

He led the way down the stairs, chatting to this old friend of his. And though Natalie was burning with impatience, she forced herself to be silent. Was it not all in her favour that this member of the mysterious Council should recur to these former days and remind himself of his intimacy with her family? She followed them in silence. He seemed to have forgotten her existence.

They passed through the courtyard, and down some broad steps. The true front of the building was on this seaward side—a huge mass of pink, with green casements. From the broad stone steps, a series of terraces, prettily laid out, descended to a lawn; but instead of passing down that way, the tall, soldierly-looking man led his companion by a side flight of steps, which enabled them to enter an *allée* cut through a mass of olives and orange and lemon trees. There were fig-trees along the wall by the side of this path; a fountain plashed coolly out there on the lawn; and beyond the opening showed the deep blue of the sea, with the clear waves breaking whitely on the shores.

They sat down on a garden-seat; and Natalie, sitting next her mother, waited patiently and breathlessly, scarcely hearing all this talk about old companions and friends.

At last the General said—

"Now about the business that brought you here: is it serious?"

"Oh yes, very," the mother said, with some colour of excitement appearing in her worn face. "It is a friend of ours in England; he has been charged by the Society with some duty that will cost him his life; we have come to intercede for him—to ask you to save him. For the sake of old times, Stefan——"

"Wait a moment," said the other, looking grave. "Do you mean the Englishman?"

"Yes, yes; the same!"

"And who has told you what it is purposed to have done?" he asked, with quite a change in his manner.

"No one," she answered, eagerly. "We guess that it is something of great danger."

"And if that is so, are you unfamiliar with persons having to incur danger? Why not an Englishman as well as another? This is an

extraordinary freak of yours, Natalie; I cannot understand it. And to have come so far when any one in England—any one of us, I mean—could have told you it was useless!"

"But why useless, if you are inclined to interfere?" she said, boldly. "And I think my father's family have some title to consideration."

"My old friend," said he, in a kindly way, "what is there in the world I would not do for you, if it were within my power? But this is not. What you ask is, to put the matter shortly, impossible—impossible!"

In the brief silence that followed, the mother heard a slight sigh; she turned instantly and saw her daughter, as white as death, about to fall. She caught her in her arms, with a slight cry of alarm.

"Here, Stefan! Take my handkerchief—dip it in the water—quick!"

The huge bullet-headed man strode across the lawn to the fountain. As he returned, and saw before him the white-lipped unconscious girl who was supported in her mother's arms, he said to himself, "Now I understand."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN APPEAL.

THIS sudden and involuntary confession of alarm and despair no doubt told her story more clearly than anything else could have done. General von Zoesch, as he chose to call himself, was excessively concerned; he held her hand till he saw the life returning to the pale, beautiful face; he was profuse and earnest in his apologies.

"My dear young lady, I beg a thousand pardons!—I had no idea of alarming you; I had no idea you were so deeply interested; come, take my arm and we will walk down into the open where the sea-air is cool. I beg a thousand pardons!"

She had pulled herself together with a desperate effort of will.

"You spoke abruptly, signore. You used the

word *impossible.* I had imagined it was unknown to you."

Her lips were rather pale; but there was a flush of colour returning to her face; and her voice had something of the old proud and pathetic ring in it.

"Yes," she continued, standing before him, with her eyes downcast, "I was told that when great trouble came upon me or mine I was to come here—to Naples—and I should find myself under the protection of the greatest power in Europe. My name—my mother's name—was to be enough. And this is the result—that a brave man, who is our friend and dear to us, is threatened with a dishonourable death; and the very power that imposed it on him—the power that was said to be invincible, and wise, and generous—is unable, or unwilling, to stir hand or foot!"

"A dishonourable death, signorina——?"

"Oh, signore," she said, with a proud indignation, "do not speak to me as if I were a child! Cannot one see what is behind all this secrecy? Cannot one see that you know well what has been done in England, by your friends and

colleagues? You put this man, who is too proud, too noble, to withdraw from his word, on a service that involves the certain sacrifice of his life. And there is no honour attached to this sacrifice—so he himself has admitted. What does that mean? What can it mean—but assassination!"

He drew back his head a little bit, as if startled, and stared at her.

"My dear young lady——!"

But her courage had not returned to her for nothing. She raised the beautiful, dark, pathetic eyes; and regarded him with an indignant fearlessness.

"That is what any one might guess," she said. "But there is more. Signore, you and your friends meditate the assassination of the King of Italy! And you call on an Englishman—an Englishman who has no love of secret and blood-stained ways——"

"Stefan!" the mother cried, quickly, and she placed her hand on the General's arm. "Do not be angry. Do not heed her—she is a child—she is quick to speak. Believe me, there are other reasons for our coming to you."

"Yes, yes, my friend Natalie; all in good time. But I am most anxious to put myself right with the signorina your daughter first of all. Now, my dear young lady," he said, taking her hand, and putting it on his arm, and gently compelling her to walk with him towards the opener space where the sea-air was cool, "I again apologize to you for having spoken unwittingly——"

"Oh, signore, do not trouble about that! It is not a matter of courtesy or politeness that is in the question: it is the life of one of one's dearest friends. There are other times for politeness!"

"Stefan!" the mother interposed, anxiously, "do not heed her—she is agitated."

"My dear Natalie," said the General, smiling, "I admire a brave woman as I admire a brave man. Do not I recognize another of you Berezolyis: the moment you think one of your friends is being wronged, fire and water won't prevent you from speaking out. No, no, my dear young lady," he said, turning to the daughter, "you cannot offend me by being loyal and outspoken."

He patted her hand, just as Calabressa had done.

"But I must ask you to listen for a moment, to remove one or two misconceptions. It is true I know something of the service which your English friend has undertaken to perform. Believe me, it has nothing to do with the assassination of the King of Italy—nothing in the world."

She lifted her dark eyes for a second, and regarded him steadily.

"I perceive," said he, "that you pay me the compliment of asking me if I lie. I do not. Reassure yourself; there are no people in this country more loyal to the present dynasty than my friends and myself. We have no time for wild Republican projects."

She looked somewhat bewildered. This speculation as to the possible nature of the service demanded of George Brand had been the outcome of many a night's anxious self-communing; and she had indulged in the wild hope that this man, when abruptly challenged, might have been startled into some avowal. For then, would not her course have been clear enough? But now she was thrown back on her former perplexity; with only the one certainty present to her mind—the certainty of the danger that confronted her lover.

"My dear young lady," he said, "it is useless for you to ask what that service is; for I shall refuse to answer you. But I assure you that you have my deepest sympathy; and I have seen a good deal of suffering from similar causes. I do not seek to break into your confidence; but I think I understand your position; you will believe me that it is with no light heart that I must repeat the word *impossible.* Need I reason with you? Need I point out to you that there is scarcely any one in the world whom we might select for a dangerous duty who would not have some one who would suffer on his account? Who is without some tie of affection, that must be cut asunder—no matter with what pain—when the necessity for the sacrifice arises? You are one of the unhappy ones: you must be brave: you must try to forget your suffering as thousands of wives and sweethearts and daughters have had to forget in thinking that their relatives and friends died in a good cause."

Her heart was proud and indignant no longer. It had grown numbed. The air from the sea felt cold.

"I am helpless, signore," she murmured. "I

do not know what that cause is. I do not know what justification you have for taking this man's life."

He did not answer that. He said—

"Perhaps, indeed, it is not those who are called on to sacrifice their life for the general good who suffer most. They can console themselves with thinking of the results. It is their friends—those dearest to them—who suffer; and who many a time would no doubt be glad to become their substitutes. It is true that we—that is, that many associations—recognize the principle of the vicarious performance of duties and punishments; but not any one yet has permitted a woman to become substitute for a man."

"What made you think of that, signore?" she asked, regarding him.

"I have known some cases," he said, evasively, "where such an offer, I think, would have been made."

"It could not be accepted?"

"Oh no!"

"Not even by the power that is the greatest in Europe?" she said, bitterly—"that is invincible, and all-generous? Oh, signore, you are too modest

in your pretensions! And the Berezolyis—they have done nothing, then, in former days to entitle them to consideration; they are but as anybody in the crowd, who might come forward and intercede for a friend; they have no old associates, then, and companions in this Society, that they cannot have this one thing granted them—that they cannot get this one man's life spared to him! Signore, your representatives mistake your powers; more than that, they mistake the strength of your memory—and your friendship!"

The red face of the bullet-headed General grew redder still; but not with anger.

"Signorina," he said, evidently greatly embarrassed, "you humiliate me. You—you do not know what you ask——"

He had led her back to the garden-seat; they had both sat down; he did not notice how her bosom was struggling with emotion.

"You ask me to interfere—to commit an act of injustice——"

"Oh, signore, signore, this is what I ask!" she cried, quite overcome; and she fell at his feet, and put her clasped hands on his knees, and broke into a wild fit of crying. "This is what I

ask of you, signore—this is what I beg from you on my knees—I ask you to give to me the life of —of my betrothed!"

She buried her face in her hands; her frame was shaken with her sobs.

"Little daughter," said he, greatly agitated, "Rise. Come, remain here for a few moments. I wish to speak to your mother—alone. Natalie!"

The elder woman accompanied him a short distance across the lawn; they stood by the fountain.

"By Heaven, I would do anything for the child," he said, rapidly. "But you see, dear friend, how it is impossible. Look at the injustice of it. If we transferred this duty to another person, what possible excuse could we make to him whom we might choose?"

He was looking back at the girl.

"It will kill her, Stefan," the mother said.

"Others have suffered also."

The elder woman seemed to collect herself a little.

"But I told you we had not said everything to you. The poor child is in despair; she has not thought of all the reasons that induced us to

come to you. Stefan, you remember my cousin Konrad?"

"Oh yes, I remember Konrad well enough," said the General, absently; for he was still regarding the younger Natalie, who sat on the bench, her hands clasped, her head bent down. "Poor fellow, he came to a sad end at last. But he always carried his life in his hands; and with a gay heart, too."

"But you remember, do you not, something before that?" the mother said, with some colour coming into her face. "You remember how my husband had him chosen—and I myself appealed—and you, Stefan, you were among the first to say that the Society must enquire——"

"Ah, but that was different, Natalie. You know why it was that that commission had to be reversed."

"Do I know? Yes. What else have I had to think about these sixteen or seventeen years since my child was separated from me?" she said, sadly. "And perhaps I have grown suspicious. Perhaps I have grown mad, to think that what has happened once might happen again."

"What?" he said, turning his clear blue eyes suddenly on her.

She did not flinch.

"Consider the circumstances, Stefan; and say whether one has no reason to suspect. The Englishman, this Mr. Brand, loves Natalie; she loves him in return; my husband refuses his consent to the marriage; and yet they meet in opposition to his wishes. Then there is another thing that I cannot so well explain; but it is something about a request on my husband's part that Mr. Brand, who is a man of wealth, should accept a certain office, and give over his property to the funds of the Society."

"I understand perfectly," her companion said, calmly. "Well?"

"Well, Mr. Brand, thinking of Natalie's future, refuses. But consider this, Stefan, that it had been hinted to him before that, in case of his refusal, he might be sent to America to remain there for life."

"I perceive, my old friend, that you are reading in your own interpretations into an ordinary matter of business. However."

"But his refusal was immediately followed by that arrangement. He was ordered to go to America. My husband no doubt considered

that that would effectually separate him and Natalie——"

"Again you are putting in your own interpretation."

"One moment, Stefan. My child is brave. She thought an injustice was being done. She thought it was for her sake that her lover was being sent away; and then she spoke frankly: she said she would go with him."

"Yes." He was now listening with more interest.

"You perceive, then, my dear friend? My husband was thwarted in every way. Then it was, and quite suddenly, that he reversed this arrangement about America; and there fell on Mr. Brand this terrible thing. Knowing what I know, do you not think I had fair cause for suspicion? And when Natalie said, 'Oh, there are those abroad who will remove this great trouble from us,' then I said to myself, 'At all events, the Society does not countenance injustice. It will see that right has been done.'"

The face of this man had grown very grave; and for some time he did not speak.

"I see what you suggest, Natalie," he said at

length. "It is a serious matter. I should have said your suspicions were idle—that the thing was impossible—but for the fact that it has occurred before. Strange, now, if old ——, whose wisdom and foresight the world is beginning to recognize now, should be proved to be wise on this point too, as on so many others. He used always to say to us: 'When once you find a man unfaithful, never trust him after. When once a man has allowed himself to put his personal advantage before his duty to such a Society as yours, it shows that somewhere or other there is in him the leaven of a self-seeker, which is fatal to all Societies. Impose the heaviest penalties on such an offence; cast him out when you have the opportunity.' It would be strange, indeed; it would be like fate; it would appear as though the thing were in the blood, and must come out, no matter what warning the man may have had before. You know, Natalie, what your husband had to endure for his former lapse?"

She nodded her head.

For some time he was again silent; and there was a deeper air of reflection on his face than almost seemed natural to it; for he looked more of a soldier than a thinker.

"If there were any informality," he said almost to himself, "in the proceedings, one might have just cause to intervene. But your husband, my Natalie," he continued, addressing her directly, "is well trusted by us. He has done us long and faithful service We should be slow to put any slight on him, especially that of suspicion."

"That, Stefan," said Natalie's mother, with courage, "is a small matter, surely, compared with the possibility of your letting this man go to his death unjustly. You would countenance, then, an act of private revenge? That is the use you would let the powers of your Society be put to? That is not what Jänecki, what Rausch, what Falevitch looked forward to!"

The taunt was quite lost on him; he was calmly regarding Natalie. She had not stirred. After that one outburst of despairing appeal, there was no more for her to say or to do. She could wait, mutely, and hear what the fate of her lover was to be.

"Unfortunately," said the General, turning and looking up at the vast pink frontage of the Villa, "there are no papers here that one can appeal to. I only secured the temporary use of the Villa, as

being a more fitting place than some to receive the signorina your daughter. But it is possible the Secretary may remember something; he has a good memory. Will you excuse me, Natalie, for a few moments?"

He strode away towards the house. The mother went over to her daughter; and put a hand on her shoulder.

"Courage, Natalushka! You must not despair yet. Ah, my old friend Stefan has a kind heart; there were tears in his eyes when he turned away from your appeal to him. He does not forget old associates."

Von Zoesch almost immediately returned, still looking pre-occupied. He drew Natalie's mother aside a few steps and said—

"This much I may tell you, Natalie; in the proceedings four were concerned—your husband, Mr. Brand, Beratinsky, Reitzei. What do you know of these last two?"

"I? Alas, Stefan, I know nothing of them."

"And we here little. They are of your husband's appointment. I may also tell you, Natalie, that the Secretary is also of my opinion, that it is very unlikely your husband would be so

audacious as to repeat his offence of former years, by conspiring to fix this duty on this man to serve his own interests. It would be too audacious--unless his temper had outrun his reason altogether."

"But you must remember, Stefan," she said, eagerly, "that there was no one in England who knew that former story. He could not imagine that I was to be, unhappily, set free to go to my daughter—that I should be at her side when this trouble fell on her——"

"Nevertheless," said he, gently interrupting her, "you have appealed to us; we will enquire. It will be a delicate affair. If there has been any complicity, any unfairness, to summon these men hither would be to make firmer confederates of them than ever. If one could get at them separately, individually——"

He kept pressing his white moustache into his teeth with his forefinger.

"If Calabressa were not such a talker," he said, absently. "But he has ingenuity, the feather-brained devil."

"Stefan, I could trust everything to Calabressa!" she said.

"In the mean time," he said, "I will not detain you. If you remain at the same hotel we shall be able to communicate with you. I presume your carriage is outside?"

"It is waiting for us a little way off."

He accompanied them into the tesselated courtyard; but not to the gate. He bade good-bye to his elder friend; then he took the younger lady's hand, and held it and regarded her.

"Figliuola mia," he said, with a kindly glance, "I pity you if you have to suffer. We will hope for better things; if it is impossible, you have a brave heart."

When they had left he went up the marble staircase and along the empty corridor until he reached a certain room.

"Granaglia, can you tell me where our friend Calabressa may happen to be at this precise moment?"

"At Brindisi, I believe, Excellenza."

"At Brindisi still. The devil of a fellow is not so impatient as I had expected. Ah, well. Have the goodness to send for him, friend Granaglia; and bid him come with speed."

"Most willingly, Excellenza."

CHAPTER IX.

AN EMISSARY.

ONE warm, still afternoon Calabressa was walking quickly along the crowded quays of Naples, when he was beset by a more than usually importunate beggar—a youth of about twelve, almost naked.

"Something for bread, signore—for the love of God—my father taken to heaven—my mother starving—bread, signore——"

"To the devil with you!" said Calabressa.

"May you burst!" replied the polite youth; and he tried to kick Calabressa's legs and make off at the same time.

This feat he failed in; so that as he was departing Calabressa hit him a cuff on the side of the head which sent him rolling. Then there was a howl; and presently a universal tumult of women, calling out, "Ah, the German! ah, the foreigner!" and so forth, and drawing threaten-

ingly near. Calabressa sought in his pockets for a handful of small copper coins; turned; threw them high in the air; and did not stay to watch the effect of the shower on the heads of the women, but walked quietly away.

However, in thus suddenly turning, he had caught sight—even with his near-sighted eyes—of an unwholesome-looking young man, pale, clean-shaven, with bushy black hair, whom he recognized. He appeared to pay no attention; but walked quickly on.

Taking one or two unnecessary turnings, he became convinced that the young man, as he had suspected, was following him. Then, without more ado, and even without looking behind him, he set out for his destination, which was Posilipo.

In due course of time he began to ascend the wooded hill with its villas and walls and cactus-hedges. At a certain turning, where he could not be observed by any one behind him, he turned sharp off to the left, and stood behind a wooden gate. A couple of minutes afterwards the young man came along—more rapidly now—for he no doubt fancied that Calabressa had disappeared ahead.

Calabressa stepped out from his hiding-place, went after him, and tapped him on the shoulder. He turned, stared, and endeavoured to appear angry and astonished.

"Oh yes, to be sure," said Calabressa, with calm sarcasm. "At your disposition, signore! So we were not satisfied with selling photographs and pebbles to the English on board the steamer; we want to get a little Judas money; we sell ourselves to the weasels, the worms, the vermin——"

"Oh, I assure you, signore——" the shaven-faced youth exclaimed, much more humbly.

"Oh, I assure you too, signore!" Calabressa continued, facetiously. "And you, you poor innocent, you have not been with the weasels six weeks when you think you will try your nose in tracking me. Body of Bacchus, it is too insolent!"

"I assure you, signore——"

"Now, behold this, my friend. We must give children like you a warning. If you had been a little older, and not quite so foolish, I should have had you put on the Black List of my friends the Camorristi—you understand? But you—we will cure you otherwise. You

know the Englishman's yacht that has come into the Great Harbour——"

"Signore, I beg of you——"

"Beg of the devil!" said Calabressa, calmly. "Between the Englishman's yacht and the Little Mole you will find a schooner moored—her name *La Svezia*. Do not forget—*La Svezia*. To-morrow you will go on board of her; ask for the captain; go down below; and beg him to be so kind as to give you twelve stripes——"

"Signore——!"

"Another word, *mouchard*, and I make it twenty. He will give you a receipt, which you will sign, and bring to me: otherwise, down goes your name on the List. Which do you prefer? Oh, we will teach some of you young weasels a lesson! I have the honour to wish you a good morning."

Calabressa touched his hat politely, and walked on, leaving the young man petrified with rage and fear.

By-and-by he began to walk more leisurely and with more circumspection, keeping a sharp look-out, as well as his near-sighted eyes allowed, on any passer-by or vehicle he happened to meet.

At length, and with the same precautions he had used on a former occasion, he entered the grounds of the villa he had sought out in the company of Gathorne Edwards; and made his way up to the fountain on the little plateau. But now his message had been previously prepared; he dropped it into the receptacle concealed beneath the lip of the fountain; and then descended the steep little terraces until he got round to the entrance of the grotto.

Instead of passing in by this cleft in the rock-work, however, he found awaiting him there the person who had summoned him—the so-called General von Zoesch. Calabressa was somewhat startled; but he said, "Your humble servant, Excellenza!" and removed his cap.

"Keep your hat on your head, friend Calabressa," said the other good-naturedly, "you are as old as I am."

He seated himself on a projecting ledge of the rock-work; and motioned to Calabressa to do likewise on the other side of the entrance. They were completely screened from observation by a mass of olive and fig trees, to say nothing of the far-stretching orange shrubbery beyond.

"The Council have paid you a high compliment, my Calabressa," the General said, plunging at once into the matter. "They have resolved to entrust you with a very difficult mission."

"It is a great honour."

"You won't have to risk your neck, which will no doubt disappoint you; but you will have to show us whether there is the stuff of a diplomatist in you."

"Oh, as for that, Excellenza," Calabressa said, confidently, "one can be a *bavard* at times, for amusement, for nonsense; and one can at times be silent, when there is necessity."

"You know of the affair of Zaccatelli. The agent has been found—as we desired, in England. I understand you know him; his name is Brand."

Calabressa uttered an exclamation.

"Excellenza, do you know what you have said! You pierce my heart. Why he of all those in England? He is the betrothed of Natalie's daughter—the Natalie Berezolyi, Excellenza, who married Ferdinand Lind——"

"I know it," said the other, calmly. "I have seen the young lady. She is a beautiful child."

"She is more than that—she is a beautiful-

souled child!" said Calabressa, in great agitation. "And she has a tender heart. I tell you it will kill her, Excellenza—oh, it is infamous!—it is not to be thought of!" He jumped to his feet and spoke in a rapid, excited way. "I say it is not to be thought of. I appeal, I, Calabressa, to the honourable the members of the Council —I say that I am ready to be his substitute—they cannot deny me—I appeal to the laws of the Society——"

"Calm yourself—calm yourself," said the General; but Calabressa would not be calm.

"I will not have my beautiful child have this grief put upon her!—you, Excellenza, will help my appeal to the Council—they cannot refuse me —what use am I to anybody or myself? I say, that the daughter of my old friend Natalie shall not have her lover taken from her—it is I, Calabressa, who claim to be his substitute!"

"Friend Calabressa, I desire you to sit down, and listen. The story is brief that I have to tell you. This man Brand is chosen by the usual ballot. The young lady does not know for what duty, of course; but believes it will cost him his life. She is in trouble; she recollects your giving

her some instructions; what does she do but start off at once for Naples, to put her head right into the den of the black bear Tommaso!"

"Ah, the brave little one! She did not forget Calabressa, and the little map, then?"

"I have seen her, and her mother."

"Her mother, also? Here, in Naples, now?"

"Yes."

"Great Heaven! What a fool I was—to come through Naples, and not to know—but I was thinking of that little viper."

"You will now be good enough to listen, my Calabressa."

"I beg your Excellency's pardon a thousand times."

"It appears that both mother and daughter are beset with the suspicion that this duty has been put upon their English friend by unfair means. At first I said to myself these suspicions were foolish; they now appear to me more reasonable. You, at all events, are acquainted with the old story against Ferdinand Lind; you know how he forfeited his life to the Society; how it was given back to him. You would think it impossible he would risk such another adven-

ture. Well, perhaps I wrong him; but there is a possibility; there are powerful reasons, I can gather, why he should wish to get rid of this Englishman."

Calabressa said nothing now; but he was greatly excited.

"We had been urging him about money, Calabressa mio—that I will explain to you. It has been coming in slowest of all from England—the richest of the countries—and just when we had so much need. Then again, there is a vacancy in the Council; and Lind has a wish that way. What happens? He tries to induce the Englishman to take an officership and give us his fortune; the Englishman refuses; he says then, 'Part from my daughter, and go to America.' The daughter says, 'If he goes, I follow.' You perceive, my friend, that if this story is true, and it is consecutive and minute as I received it, there was a reason for our colleague Lind to be angry and to be desirous of making it certain that this Englishman who had opposed him should not have his daughter."

"I perceive it well, Excellenza. Meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile, that is all! Only, when an old

friend—when one who has such claims on our Society as a Berezolyi naturally has—comes and tells you such a story, you listen, with attention and respect. You may believe, or you may not believe; one prefers not to believe, when the matter touches upon the faith of a colleague who has been trustworthy for many years. But at the same time, if the Council, being appealed to, and being anxious above all things that no wrong should be done, were to find an agent, prudent, silent, cautious, who might be armed with plenary powers of pardon, for example, supposing there were an accomplice to be bribed—if the Council were to commission such an one as you, my Calabressa, to institute enquiries, and perhaps to satisfy those two appellants that no injustice has been done, you would undertake the task with diligence, with a sense of responsibility, would you not?"

"With joy—with a full heart, Excellenza!" Calabressa exclaimed.

"Oh no, not at all—with prudence, and disinterestedness; with calmness and no prejudice. And above all with a resolution to conceal from our friend and colleague Lind that any slight of suspicion is being put upon him."

"Oh, you can trust me, Excellenza!" Calabressa said, eagerly. "Let me do this—for the sake of the sweetheart of my old age—that is that beautiful-souled little one. And if I cannot bring her peace and security one way—mind, I go without prejudice—I swear to you I go without bias—I will harm no one even in intention—but this I say, that if I fail that way, there is another."

"You have seen the two men, Beratinsky and Reitzei, who were of the ballot along with Lind and the Englishman. To me they are but names. Describe them."

"Beratinsky," said Calabressa, promptly, "a bear, surly, pig-headed; Reitzei, a fop, sinuous, petted."

"Which would be the more easily startled, for example?" the tall man said, with a smile.

"Oh, your Excellency, leave that to me," Calabressa answered. "Give me no definite instructions: am I not a volunteer? can I not do as I please, always with the risk that one may knock me over the head if I am impertinent?"

"Well, then, if we leave it to your discretion,

friend Calabressa, to your ingenuity, and your desire to have justice without bias? Have you money?"

"Not at all, Excellenza."

"The Secretary Granaglia will communicate with you this evening. You can start at once?"

"By the direct train to-morrow morning at seven, Excellenza." Then he added, "Oh, the devil!"

"What, now?"

"There was a young fellow, Excellenza, committed the imprudence of dogging my footsteps this afternoon. I know him. I stopped him and referred him to the captain of the schooner *La Svezia:* he was to bring me the receipt to-morrow."

"Never mind," said the General, laughing; "we will look after him when he goes on board. Now do you understand, friend Calabressa, the great delicacy of the mission the Council have entrusted to you? You must be patient, sure, unbiased; and if, as I imagine, Lind and you were not the best of friends at one time in your life, you must forget all that. You are not going as the avenger of his daughter; you are going as

the minister of justice. Only, you have power behind you; that you can allow to be known, indirectly. Do you understand?"

"It is as clear as the noonday skies. Confide in me, Excellenza."

The other rose.

"Use speed, my Calabressa. Farewell!"

"One word, Excellenza. If it is not too great a favour: the hotel where my beautiful Natalushka and her mother are staying?"

The other gave him the name of the hotel; and Calabressa, saluting him respectfully, departed, making his way down through the vines and fruit trees, under the clear twilight skies.

Calabressa walked back to Naples, and to the hotel indicated, which was near the Castello dell' Ovo. No sooner had the hotel-porter opened for him the big swinging doors than he recollected that he did not know for whom he ought to ask; but at this moment Natalie came along the corridor, dressed and ready to go out.

"My little daughter!" he exclaimed, taking her by both hands. "Did not I say you would soon find me, when there was need?"

"Will you come upstairs and see my mother, Signor Calabressa?" said she. "You know why she and I are together now?—my grandfather is dead."

"Yes, I will go and see your mother," said he, after a second; she did not notice the strange expression of his face during that brief hesitation.

There was a small sitting-room between the two bedrooms; Natalie conducted him into it; and went into the adjoining chamber for her mother. A minute after these two friends and companions of former days met.

They held each other's hand, in silence, for a brief time.

"My hair was not so grey when you last saw me," the worn-faced woman said, at length, with a smile.

Calabressa could not speak at all.

"Mother," the girl said, to break in on this painful embarrassment, "you have not seen Signor Calabressa for so long a time. Will he not stay and dine with us? the *table-d'hôte* is at half-past six."

"Not the *table-d'hôte*, my little daughter,"

Calabressa said, quickly. "But if one were permitted to remain here, for example——?"

"Oh yes, certainly."

"There are many things I wish to speak about; and so little time. To-morrow morning I start for England."

"For England?"

"Most certainly, little daughter. And you have a message, perhaps, for me to carry? Oh, you may let it be cheerful," he said, with his usual gay optimism. "I tell you, I myself, and I do not boast, let it be cheerful! What did I say to you? You are in trouble; I said to you—Count upon having friends!"

Calabressa did stay; and they had a kind of meal in this room; and there was a great deal to talk over between the two old friends. But on all matters referring to the moment, he preserved a resolute silence. He was not going to talk, at the very outset. He was going to England—that was all.

But as he was bidding good-bye to Natalie, he drew her a step or two into the passage.

"Little child," said he, in a low voice, "your mother is suffering because of your sorrow. It is

needless. I assure you, all will be well: have I spoken in vain before? It is not for one bearing the name that you have to despair."

"Good-bye, then, Signor Calabressa."

"*Au revoir*, child: is not that better?"

CHAPTER X.

A WEAK BROTHER.

GEORGE BRAND was sitting alone in these rooms of his, the lamps lit, the table near him covered with papers. He had just parted with two visitors—Molyneux and a certain learned gentleman attached to Owen's College—who had come to receive his final plans and hints as to what still lay before them in the north. On leaving, the fresh-coloured, brisk-voiced Molyneux had said to him—

"Well, Mr. Brand, seeing you so eager about what has to be done up there, one might wonder at your leaving us and going off pleasuring. But no matter. A man must have his holiday; so I wish you a pleasant journey; and we'll do our best till you come back."

So that also was settled. In fact, he had brought all his affairs up to a point that would

enable him to start at any moment. But about Natalie? He had not heard from her through any channel whatever. He had not the least idea whither she had gone. Moreover, he gathered from Reitzei that her father—who, in Reitzei's opinion, could at once have discovered where she was—refused to trouble himself in the matter, and indeed would not permit her name to be mentioned in his presence.

He leant back in his chair, with a sigh. Of what value to him now were these carefully calculated suggestions about districts, centres, conveners, and what not? And yet he had appeared deeply interested while his two visitors were present. For the time being the old eagerness had stirred him; the pride he had taken in his own work. But now that was passed from him; he had relinquished his stewardship; and as he absently gazed out into the black night before him, his thoughts drifted far away.

He was startled from his reverie by some one knocking at the door. Immediately after Gathorne Edwards entered.

"Waters said I should find you alone," said the tall, pale, blue-eyed student. "I have come to you about Kirski."

"Sit down. Well?"

"It's a bad business," he said, taking a chair, and looking rather gloomy and uncomfortable. "He has taken to drink—badly. I have been to him; talked to him; but I have no influence over him, apparently. I thought perhaps you might do something with him."

"Why, I cannot even speak to him!"

"Oh, he is accustomed to make much out of a few words. And I would go with you."

"But what is the occasion of all this? How can he have taken to drink in so short a time?"

"A man can drink himself into a pretty queer state in a very short time, when he sets his mind to it," Edwards said. "He has given up his work altogether, and is steadily boosing away the little savings he had made. He has gone back to his blood and killing, too; wants some one to go with him to murder that fellow out in Russia who first of all took his wife and then beat him and set the dogs on him. The fact is, Calabressa's cure has gone all to bits."

"It is a pity. The unfortunate wretch has had enough trouble. But what is the cause of it?"

"It is rather difficult to explain," said Edwards with some embarrassment. "One can only guess —for his brain is muddled, and he maunders. You know Calabressa's flowery, poetical interpretation. It was—Miss Lind, in fact—who had worked a miracle. Well, there was something in it. She was kind to him, after he had been cuffed about Europe, and a sort of passion of gratitude took possession of him. Then he was led to believe at that time that—that he might be of service to her or her friends—and he gave up his projects of revenge altogether—he was ready for any sacrifice—and, in fact, there was a project——"

Edwards glanced at his companion; but Brand happened at that moment to be looking out of the window.

"Well, you see, all that fell through; and he had to come back to England, disappointed; then there was no Calabressa to keep him up to his resolutions; besides that, he found out—how, I do not know—that Miss Lind had left London."

"Oh, he found that out?"

"Apparently. And he says he is of no further use to anybody; and all he wants is to

kill the man Michaieloff, and then make an end of himself."

Brand rose at once.

"We must go and see the unfortunate devil, Edwards. His brain never was steady, you know; and I suppose even two or three days' hard drinking has made him wild again. And just as I had prepared a little surprise for him!"

"What?" Edwards asked, as he opened the door.

"I have made him a little bequest, that would have produced him about twenty pounds a year, to pay his rent. It will be no kindness to give it to him, until we see him straight again."

But Edwards pushed the door to again, and said, in a low voice—

"Of course, Mr. Brand, you must know of the Zaccatelli affair?"

Brand regarded him, and said, calmly—

"I do. There are five men in England who know of it; you and I are two of them."

"Well," said Edwards, eagerly, "if such a thing were determined on, wouldn't it have been better to let this poor wretch do it? He would have gloried in it; he had the enthusiasm of the

martyr just then; he thought he was to be allowed to do something that would make Miss Lind and her friends for ever grateful to him."

"And who put it into his head that Miss Lind knew anything about it?—Calabressa, I suppose."

Edwards coloured slightly.

"Well, yes——"

"And it was Calabressa who entrusted such a secret as that to a maniac——"

"Pardon me, Kirski never knew specifically what lay before him; but he was ready for anything. For my own part, I was heartily glad when they sent him back to England. I did not wish to have any hand in such a business, however indirectly. And, indeed, I hope they have abandoned the whole project by this time."

"It might be wiser, certainly," said Brand, with an indifferent air.

"If they go on with it, it will make a fearful noise in Europe," said Edwards, contemplatively. "The assassination of a Cardinal! Well, his life has been scandalous enough—but still, his death, in such a way——"

"It will horrify people, will it not?" Brand

said, calmly. "And his murderer will be execrated and howled at, throughout Europe, no doubt?"

"Well, yes; you see, who is to know the motives——"

"There won't be a single person to say a single word for him," said Brand, absently. "It is an enviable fate, isn't it, for some wretched mortal? No matter, Edwards; we will go and look up this fellow Kirski now."

They went out into the night—it was cold and drizzling—and made their way up into Soho. They knocked at the door of a shabby-looking house; and Kirski's landlady made her appearance. She was very angry when his name was mentioned; of course, he was not at home; they would find him in some public-house or other—the animal!

"But he pays his rent, doesn't he?" Brand remonstrated.

Oh yes, he paid his rent. But she didn't like a wild beast in the house. It was decent lodgings she kept; not a Wombwell's Menagerie.

"I am sure he gives you no trouble, ma'am," said Edwards, who had seen something of the meek and submissive way the Russian conducted himself in his lodgings.

This she admitted; but promptly asked how she was to know she mightn't have her throat cut some night? And what was the use of her talking to him, when he didn't know two words of a Christian language?

They gathered from this that the good woman had been lecturing her docile lodger, and had been seriously hurt because of his inattention. However, she at last consented to give them the name of the particular public-house in which he was likely to be found; and they again set off in quest of him.

They found him easily. He was seated in a corner of the crowded and reeking bar-room, by himself, nursing a glass of gin and water with his two trembling hands. When they entered, he looked up and regarded them with bleared, sunken eyes; evidently recognized them; and then turned away, sullenly.

"Tell him I am not come to bully him," said Brand, quickly. "Tell him I am come about some work. I want a cabinet made, by a first-class workman like himself."

Edwards went forward, and put his hand on the man's shoulder and spoke to him for some time. Then he turned to Brand.

"He says, 'No use; no use. He cannot work any more. They won't give him help to kill Pavel Michaieloff. He wishes to die.'"

"Ask him, then, what the young lady who gave him her portrait will think of him if she hears he is in this condition. Ask him how he has dared to bring her portrait into a place like this."

When this was conveyed to Kirski, he seemed to arouse himself somewhat; he even talked eagerly for a few seconds; then he turned away again, as if he did not wish to be seen.

"He says," Edwards continued, "that he has not, that he would not, bring that portrait into any such place. He was afraid it might be found—it might be taken from him. He made a small casket, of oak, carved by his own hands, and lined it with zinc; he put the photograph in it; and hid himself in the trees of St. James's Park—at least, I imagine that St. James's Park is what he means—at night. Then he buried it there. He knows the place. When he has killed Michaieloff, he will come back, and dig it up."

"The poor devil—his brain is certainly going,

drink or no drink. What is to be done with him, Edwards?"

"He says the young lady has gone away. He cares for nothing. He is of no use. He despairs of getting enough money to take him back to Russia."

After a great deal of persuasion, however, they got him to leave the public-house with them, and return to his lodgings. They got him some tea and some bread-and-butter; and made him swallow both. Then Edwards, under his friend's instructions, proceeded to impress on Kirski that the young lady was only away from London for a short time; that she would be greatly distressed if she were to hear he had been misconducting himself; that, if he returned to his work on the following morning, he would find that his master would overlook his absence; and that finally he was to abandon his foolish notions about going to Russia, for he would find no one to assist him, whereas, on the other hand, if he went about proclaiming that he was about to commit a crime, he would be taken by the police and shut up. All this, and a great deal more, they tried to impress on him; and Edwards

promised to call the next evening, and see how he was getting on.

It was late when Brand and Edwards again issued out into the wet night; and Edwards, having promised to post a line to Kirski's employers, so that they should get it in the morning, said good-bye, and went off to his own lodgings. Brand walked slowly home, through the muddy streets. He preferred the glare and the noise to the solitude of his own rooms. He even stood aimlessly to watch a theatre come out; the people seemed so careless and joyous—calling to each other—making feeble jokes—passing away under their umbrellas into the wet and shining darkness.

But at length, without any definite intention, he found himself at the foot of the little thoroughfare in which he lived; and he was about to open the door with his latch-key when, out of the dusk beyond, there stepped forth a tall figure. He was startled, it is true, by the apparition of this tall, white-haired man in the voluminous blue cloak, the upturned hood of which half concealed his face; and he turned with a sort of instinct of anger to face him.

"Monsieur mon frère, you have arrived at last!" said the stranger, and instantly he recognized, in the pronunciation of the French, the voice of Calabressa.

"What," he said, "Calabressa?"

The other put a finger on his arm.

"Hush!" he said. "It is a great secret, my being here; I confide in you. I would not wait in your rooms—my faith, no!—for I said to myself, 'What if he brings home friends who will know me, who will ask what the devil Calabressa is doing in this country.'"

Brand had withdrawn his hand from the lock.

"Calabressa," he said, quickly, "you, if anybody knows, must know where Natalie and her mother are. Tell me!"

"I will, directly. But may I point out to you, my dear Monsieur Brand, that it rains—that we might go inside? Oh yes, certainly, I will tell you, when we can say a word in secret, in comfort. But this devil of a climate! What should I have done if I had not bought myself this cloak in Paris? In Paris it was cold and wet enough; but one had nothing like what you have here. Sapristi! my fingers are frozen!"

Brand hurried him upstairs; put him into an easy-chair; and stirred up the fire.

"Now," said he, impatiently, "now, my dear Calabressa, your news!"

Calabressa pulled out a letter.

"The news?—voilà!"

Brand tore open the envelope: these were the contents:—

"DEAREST,

"This is to adjure you not to leave England for the present—not till you hear from me—or until we return. Have patience, and hope. You are not forgotten. My mother sends you her blessing.

"YOUR BETROTHED."

"But there is no address!" he exclaimed. "Where are they?"

"Where are they? It is no secret, do you see? They are in Naples."

"In Naples!"

"Oh, I assure you, my dear friend, it is a noble heart, a brave heart, that loves you. Many a day ago I said to her, 'Little child, when you are in trouble, go to friends who will welcome

you; say you are the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi; say to them that Calabressa sent you.' And you thought she was in no trouble! Ah, did she not tell me of the pretty home you had got for the poor mother who is my old friend; did she not tell me how you thought they were to be comfortable there, and take no heed of anything else! But you were mistaken. You did not know her. She said, 'My betrothed is in danger: I will take Calabressa at his word: before any one can hinder me, or interfere, I will go and appeal, in the name of my family, in the name of myself!' Ah, the brave child!"

"But appeal to whom?" said Brand, breathlessly.

"To the Council, my friend!" said Calabressa, with exultation.

"But, gracious heavens!" Brand cried, with his hand nervously clutching the arm of his chair. "Is the secret betrayed, then? Do they think I will shelter myself behind a woman?"

"She could betray no secret!" Calabressa said, triumphantly, "she herself not knowing it, do you not perceive? But she could speak—bravely!"

"And the result?"

"Who knows what that may be? In the mean time this is the result—I am here."

At another moment this assumption of dignity would have been ludicrous; but Brand took no heed of the manner of his companion. His heart was beating wildly. And even when his reason forced him to see how little he could expect from this intervention—when he remembered what a decree of the Council was, and how irrevocable the doom he had himself accepted—still the thought uppermost in his mind was not of his own safety or danger, but rather of her love and devotion, her resolve to rescue him, her quick and generous impulse that knew nothing of fear. He pictured her to himself, in Naples, calling upon this nameless and secret power, that every man around him dreaded, to reverse its decision! And then the audacity of her bidding him hope! He could not hope; he knew more than she did. But his heart was full of love and of gratitude, as he thought of her.

"My dear friend," said Calabressa, lowering his voice, "my errand is one of great secrecy. I have a commission which I cannot altogether

explain to you. But in the mean time you will be so good as to give me—*in extenso*, with every particular—the little history of how you were appointed to—to undertake a certain duty."

"Unfortunately, I cannot," Brand said, calmly. "These are things one is not permitted to talk about."

"But I must insist on it, my dear friend."

"Then I must insist on refusing you."

"You are trustworthy. No matter. Here is something which I think will remove your suspicions, my good friend—or shall we not rather say your scruples?"

He took from his pocket-book a card; and placed it somewhat ostentatiously on the table. Brand examined it; and then stared at Calabressa in surprise.

"You come with the authority of the Council?"

"By the goodness of Heaven!" Calabressa exclaimed, with a laugh, "you have arrived at the truth this time!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONJUROR.

THERE was no mistaking the fact that Calabressa had come armed with ample authority from the Council; and yet it was with a strange reluctance that Brand forced himself to answer the questions that Calabressa proceeded to put to him. He had already accepted his doom. The bitterness of it was over. He would rather have let the past be forgotten altogether, and himself go forward, blindly, to the appointed end. Why these needless explanations and admissions?

Moreover, Calabressa's questions, which had been thought over during long railway journeys, were exceedingly crafty. They touched here and there on certain small points, as if he were building up for himself a story. But at last Brand said, by way of protest—

"Look here, Calabressa. I see you are em-

powered to ask me any questions you like—and I am quite willing to answer—about the business of the Council. But really, don't you see, I would rather not speak of private matters. What can the Council want to know about Natalie Lind? Leave her out of it, like a good fellow."

"Oh yes, my dear Monsieur Brand," said Calabressa, with a smile, "leave her out of it, truly, when she has gone to the Council; when the Council have said, 'Child, you have not appealed to us for nothing;' when it is through her that I have travelled all through the cold and wet, and am now sitting here. Remember this, my friend, that the beautiful Natalushka is now a—what do you call it?—a *ward*"—Calabressa put this word in English into the midst of his odd French—"and a *ward* of a sufficiently powerful Court, I can assure you, Monsieur! Therefore, I say, I cannot leave the beautiful child out. She is of importance to me: why am I here otherwise? Be considerate, my friend; it is not impertinence; it is not curiosity."

Then he proceeded with his task; getting, in a roundabout, cunning, shrewd way, at a pretty fair version of what had occurred. And he was ex-

ceedingly circumspect. He endeavoured by all sorts of circumlocutions to hide from Brand the real drift of his enquiry. He would betray suspicion of no one. His manner was calm, patient, almost indifferent. All this time Brand's thoughts were far away. He was speaking to Calabressa; but he was thinking of Naples.

But when they came to Brand's brief description of what took place in Lisle Street on the night of the casting of the lot, Calabressa became greatly excited; though he strove to appear perfectly calm.

"You are sure?" he said, quickly. "That was precisely what happened?"

"As far as I know," said Brand, carelessly. "But why go into it? If I do not complain, why should any one else?"

"Did I say that any one complained?" observed the astute Calabressa.

"Then why should any one wish to interfere? I am satisfied. You do not mean to say, Calabressa, that any one over there thinks that I am anxious to back out of what I have undertaken—that I am going down on my knees and begging to be let off? Well, at all events, Natalie does not

think that," he added, as if it did not matter much what any other thought.

Calabressa was silent; but his eyes were eager and bright; and he was quickly tapping the palm of his left hand with the forefinger of the right. Then he regarded Brand, with a sharp, inquisitive look. Then he jumped to his feet.

"Good night, my friend," he said, hurriedly.

But Brand rose also; and sought to detain him.

"No, no, my good Calabressa, you are not going yet; you have kept me talking for your amusement; now it is your turn. You have not yet told me about Natalie and her mother."

"They are well—they are indeed well, I assure you," said Calabressa, uneasily. He was clearly anxious to get away. By this time he had got hold of his cloak and swung it round his shoulders.

"Calabressa, sit down, and tell me something about Natalie. What made her undertake such a journey? Is she troubled? Is she sad? I thought her life was full of interest now—her mother being with her."

Calabressa had got his cap, and had opened the door.

"Another time, dear Monsieur Brand, I will sit down and tell you all about the beautiful, brave child, and my old friend her mother. Yes, yes—another time—to-morrow—next day. At present one is overwhelmed with affairs, do you see?"

So saying, he forced Brand to shake hands with him, and went out, shutting the door behind him.

But no sooner had he got into the street than the eager, talkative, impulsive nature of the man, so long confined, broke loose. He took no heed that it was raining hard. He walked fast; he talked aloud to himself, in his native tongue, in broken interjectional phrases; occasionally he made use of violent gestures which were not lessened in their effect by the swaying cape of his cloak.

"Ah, those English—those English," he was excitedly saying,—"such children!—blue, clear eyes that see nothing—the devil! why should they meddle in such affairs? To play at such a game!—fool's mate; scholar's mate; asses' and idiots' mate!—they have scarcely got a pawn out, and they are wondering what they will do, when whizz! along comes the queen, and she and the bishop have finished all the fine combinations

before they were ever begun! And you, you others, imps of hell, to play that old, foolish game again! But take care, my friends, take care; there is one watching you, one waiting for you, who does not speak; but who strikes! Ah, it is a pretty game; you, you sullen brute; you, you fop and dandy; but when you are sitting silent round the board, behold a dagger flashes down and quivers into the wood! No wonder your eyes burn! you do not know whence it has come? But the steel blade quivers; is it a warning?"

He laughed aloud; but there were still omnibuses and cabs in the street; so he was not heard. Indeed, the people who were on the pavement were hurrying past to get out of the rain; and took no notice of the old albino in the voluminous cloak.

"Natalushka," said he, quite as if he were addressing some one before him, "do you know that I am trudging through the mud of this infernal city, all for you? And you, little sybarite, are among the fine ladies in the reading-room at the hotel; and listening to music; and the air all scented around you. Never mind;

if only I had a little bird that could fly to you with a message—ah, would you not have pleasant dreams to-night? Did I not tell you to rely on Calabressa? He chatters to you; he tries to amuse you; but he is not always Policinella. No, not always Policinella; sometimes he is silent and cunning; sometimes—what do you think?—he is a conjuror. Oh yes, you are not seen; you are not heard; but when you have them round the board—whirr! comes the gleaming blade, and quivers in the wood! You look round; the guilty one shakes with the palsy; his wits go; his startled tongue confesses. Then you laugh; you say, 'That is well done;' you say, 'Were they wrong in giving this affair to Calabressa?'"

Now, whether it was that his rapid walking helped to relieve him of this over-excitement, or whether it was that the soaking rain began to make him uncomfortable, he was much more staid in demeanour when he got up to the little lane off Oxford Street where the *Culturverein* held its meetings. Of course, he did not knock and demand admission. He stopped some way down the street, on the other side, where he found

shelter from the rain in a doorway, and whence he could readily observe any one coming out from the hall of the Verein. Then he succeeded in lighting a cigarette.

It was a miserable business, this waiting in the cold, damp night-air; but sometimes he kept thinking of how he would approach Reitzei in the expected interview; and sometimes he thought of Natalie; and again, with his chilled and dripping fingers, he would manage to light a cigarette. Again and again the door of the hall was opened; and this or the other figure came out from the glare of the gas into the dark street; but so far no Reitzei. It was now nearly one in the morning.

Finally, about a quarter past one, the last batch of boon companions came out; and the lights within were extinguished. Calabressa followed this gay company, who were laughing and joking despite the rain, for a short way; but it was clear that neither Beratinsky nor Reitzei was among them. Then he turned and made his way to his own lodgings, where he arrived tired, soaked through, but not, apparently, disheartened.

Next morning he was up betimes; and at a fairly early hour walked along to Coventry Street, where he took up his station at the west corner of Rupert Street, so that he could see any one going eastward, himself unseen. Here he was more successful. He had not been there ten minutes when Reitzei passed. Calabressa hastened after him; overtook him; and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Ah, Calabressa?" said Reitzei, surprised, but in no way disconcerted.

"I wish to speak with you," said Calabressa, himself a little agitated, though he did not show it.

"Certainly. Come along. Mr. Lind will arrive soon."

"No, alone. I wish to speak with you alone."

Calabressa looked around. The only place of shelter he saw was a rather shabby restaurant, chiefly used as a supper-room, and at this moment having the appearance of not being yet woke up. Reitzei was in a compliant mood. He suffered himself to be conducted into this place, to the astonishment of one or two unwashed-looking waiters who were seated and reading the previous

evening's papers. Calabressa and Reitzei sat down at one of the small tables; the former ordered some coffee, the latter a bottle of soda-water.

By this time Calabressa had collected himself for the part he was about to play.

"Well, my friend," said he, cheerfully, "what news? When is Europe to hear of the fate of the Cardinal?"

"I don't know; I know very little about it," said Reitzei, glancing at him rather suspiciously.

"It is a terrible business," said Calabressa, reflectively, "a decree of the Council. You would think that one so powerful, so well protected, would be able to escape, would you not? But he himself knows better. He knows he is as powerless as you might be, for example, or myself."

"Oh, as for that," said Reitzei, boldly, "he knows he has deserved it: what more? He has had his little fling; now comes the settlement of the score."

"And I hear that our friend Brand is to be the instrument of justice: how strange! He has not been so long with us."

"That is Mr. Lind's affair: it has nothing to do with me," said Reitzei, shortly.

"Well," said Calabressa, toying with his coffee-cup, "I hope I shall never be tempted to do anything that might lead the Council to condemn me. Fancy such a life; every moment expecting some one to step up behind you with a knife or a pistol; and the end sure! I would take Provana's plan. The poor devil; as soon as he heard he had been condemned, he could not bear living. He never thought of escape: a few big stones in the pockets of his coat, and over he slips into the Arno. And Mesentskoff: you remember him? His only notion of escape was to give himself up to the police;—twenty-five years in the mines. I think Provana's plan was better."

Reitzei became a little uneasy, or perhaps only impatient.

"Well, Calabressa," he said, "one must be getting along to one's affairs——"

"Oh yes, yes, truly," Calabressa said. "I only wished to know a little more about the Cardinal. You see he cannot give himself up like Mesentskoff; though he might confess to a

hundred worse things than the Russian ever did. Provana—well, you know, the Society has always been inexorable with regard to its own officers: and rightly, too, Reitzei, is it not so? If one finds malversation of justice amongst those in a high grade, should not the punishment be exemplary? The higher the power, the higher the responsibility. You, for example, are much too shrewd a man to risk your life by taking any advantage of your position as one of the officers——"

"I don't understand you, Calabressa," the other said, somewhat hotly.

"I only meant to say," Calabressa observed, carelessly, "that the punishment for malversation of justice on the part of an officer is so terrible, so swift, and so sure, that no one but a madman would think of running the risk——"

"Yes, but what has that to do with me?" Reitzei said, angrily.

"Nothing, my dear friend, nothing," said Calabressa, soothingly, "But now, about this selection of Mr. Brand——"

Reitzei turned rather pale for a second; but said instantly, and with apparent anger—

"I tell you that is none of my business. That is Mr. Lind's business. What have I to do with it?"

"Do not be so impatient, my friend," said Calabressa, looking at his coffee. "We will say that, as usual, there was a ballot. All quite fair. No man wishes to avoid his duty; it is the simplest thing in the world to mark one of your pieces of paper with a red mark; whoever receives the marked paper undertakes the commission. All is quite fair, I say. Only, you have seen, I dare say, the common, the pitiful trick of the conjuror who throws a pack of cards on the table, backs up. You take one; look at it privately; return it; and the cards are shuffled. Without lifting the cards at all he tells you that the one you selected was the eight of diamonds: why? It is no miracle: all the cards are eights of diamonds; though you, you poor innocent, do not know that. It is a wretched trick," added Calabressa, coolly.

Reitzei drank off the remainder of his soda-water at a gulp. He stared at Calabressa, in silence, afraid to speak.

"My dear friend Reitzei," said Calabressa, at

length raising his eyes and fixing them on his companion, "you could not be so insane as to play any trick like that?—having four pieces of paper, for example, all marked red, the marks under the paper? You would not enter into any such conspiracy? For you know, friend Reitzei, that the punishment is—death!"

The man had turned a ghastly grey-green colour. He was apparently choking with thirst, though he had just finished the soda-water. He could not speak.

Calabressa calmly waited for him; but in his heart he was saying exultingly—"*Ha, the dagger quivers in the board; his eyes are starting from his head; is it Calabressa or Cagliostro that has paralyzed him?*"

At length the wretched creature opposite him gasped out—

"Beratinsky——"

But he could say no more. He motioned to a waiter to bring him some more soda-water.

"Yes, Beratinsky?" said Calabressa, calmly regarding the livid face.

"——has betrayed us!" he said, with trembling lips. In fact, there was no fight in

him at all; no angry repudiation; he was helpless with this sudden bewilderment of fear.

"Not quite," said Calabressa; and he now spoke in a low, eager voice. "It is for you to save yourself by forestalling him. It is your one chance: otherwise the decree; and good-bye to this world for you! See—look at this card—I say it is your only chance, friend Reitzei—for I am empowered by the Council to promise you, or Beratinsky, or any one, a free pardon on confession. Oh, I assure you, the truth is clear: has not one eyes? You poor devil, you cannot speak: shall I go to Beratinsky and see whether he can speak?"

"What must I do—what must I do?" the other gasped, in abject terror; Calabressa, regarding this exhibition of cowardice, could not help wondering how Lind had allowed such a creature to associate with him.

Then Calabressa, sure of victory, began to breathe more freely. He assumed a lofty air.

"Trust in me, friend Reitzei. I will instruct you. If you can persuade the Council of the truth of your story, I promise you they will absolve you from the operations of a certain

Clause which you know of. Meanwhile you will come to my lodgings and write a line to Lind, excusing yourself for the day. Then this evening I dare say it will be convenient for you to start for Naples? Oh, I assure you, you owe me thanks: you did not know the danger you were in; hereafter you will say, 'Well, it was no other than Calabressa who pulled me out of that quagmire.'"

A few minutes thereafter Calabressa was in a telegraph-office; and this was the message that he despatched:—

Colonna, London: to Bartolotti, Vicolo Isotta, No. 15, *Naples. Ridotto will arrive immediately, colours down. Send orders for Luigi and Bassano to follow.*

"It is a bold stroke," he was saying to himself, as he left the office, "but I have run some risks in my time. What is one more or less?"

CHAPTER XII.

FIAT JUSTITIA.

THIS scheme of Calabressa's had been so rapidly conceived and put in execution, that he had had no time to think of its possible or certain consequences, in the event of his being successful. His immediate and sole anxiety was to make sure of his captive. There was always the chance that a frightened and feeble creature like Reitzei might double back; he might fly to Lind and Beratinsky, and seek security in a new compact; for who could prove anything if the three were to maintain their innocence? However, as Calabressa shrewdly perceived, Reitzei was in the dark as to how much the Council knew already. Moreover, Reitzei had his suspicions of Beratinsky. If there was to be a betrayal, he was clearly resolved to have the benefit of it.

Nevertheless Calabressa did not lose sight

of him for a moment. He took him to his, Calabressa's, lodgings ; kept assuring him that he ought to be very grateful for being thus allowed to escape ; got him to write and despatch a note to Lind, excusing himself for that day and the next ; and then proceeded to give him instructions as to what he should do in Naples. These instructions, by the way, were entirely unnecessary ; it was no part of Calabressa's plan to allow Reitzei to arrive in Naples alone.

After a mid-day meal, Calabressa and Reitzei walked up to the lodgings of the latter, where he got a few travelling-things put together. By-and-by they went to the railway station ; Calabressa suggesting that it was better for Reitzei to get away from London as soon as possible. The old albino saw his companion take his seat in the train for Dover ; and then turned away and re-entered the busy world of the London streets.

The day was fine after the rain ; the pavements were white and dry ; he kept in the sunlight for the sake of the warmth. But he had not much attention for the sights and sounds around him. Now that this sudden scheme promised to be entirely successful, he could consider the

probable consequences of that success ; and, as usual, his first thought was about Natalie.

" Poor child—poor child ! " he said to himself, rather sadly. " How could she tell how this would end ? If she saves the life of her lover, it is at the cost of the life of her father. The poor child !—must misfortune meet her whichever way she turns ? "

And then, too, some touch of compunction or even remorse entered into his own bosom. He had been so eager in the pursuit ; he had been so anxious to acquit himself to the satisfaction of the Council, that he had scarcely remembered that his success would almost certainly involve the sacrifice of one who was at least an old colleague. Ferdinand Lind and Calabressa had never been the very best of friends ; during one period, indeed, they had been rivals ; but that had been forgotten in the course of years ; and what Calabressa now remembered was that Lind and he had at least been companions in the old days.

" Seventeen years ago," he was thinking, " he forfeited his life to the Society ; and they gave it back to him. They will not pardon him this time. And who is to take the news to Natalie

and the beautiful, brave child? Ah, what will she say? My God, is there no happiness for any one in this world!"

He was greatly distressed; but in his distress he became desperate. He would not look that way at all. He boldly justified himself for what he had done; and strove to regard it with satisfaction. What if both Lind and Beratinsky were to suffer; had they not merited any punishment that might befall them? Had they not compassed the destruction of an innocent man? Would it have been better, then, that George Brand should have become the victim of an infamous conspiracy? *Fiat justitia!*—no matter at what cost. Natalie must face the truth. Better that the guilty should suffer than the innocent. And he, Calabressa, for one, was not going to shirk any responsibility for what might happen. He had obeyed the orders of the Council. He had done his duty; that was enough.

He forced himself not to think of Natalie, and of the dismay and horror with which she would learn of one of the consequences of her appeal. This was a matter between men; to be settled by men: if the consciences of women were tender,

it could not be helped. Calabressa walked faster and faster, as if he were trying to get away from something that followed and annoyed him. He pretended to himself that he was deeply interested in a shop-window here or there; occasionally he whistled; he sang, "Vado a Napoli in barchetta," with forced gaiety; he twisted his long white moustache; and then he made his way down to Brand's rooms.

Here he was also very gay.

"Now, my dear Monsieur Brand, to-day I have idleness; to-day I will talk to you; yesterday I could not."

"Unfortunately," said Brand, "our positions are reversed now. For here is a letter from Lind, wanting me to go up to Lisle Street. It seems Reitzei has had to go off into the country, leaving a lot of correspondence——"

"You are, then, on good terms with Lind?" Calabressa interposed, quickly.

"Yes; why not?" said Brand, with a stare.

"I, also, I say—Why not? It is excellent. Then you have no time for my chatter?" said Calabressa, carelessly regarding the open letter.

"At least you can tell me something about

Natalie and her mother. Are they well? What hotel are they at?"

Calabressa laughed.

"Yes, yes, my friend Monsieur Brand, you say, 'Are they well?' What you mean is, 'What has taken them to Naples?' *Bien*, you are right to wonder; you will not have to wonder long. A little patience; you will hear something; do not be surprised. And you have no message, for example, by way of reply to the letter I brought you?"

"You are returning to Naples, then?"

"To-night. I will take a message for you; if you have no time now, send it to me at Charing Cross. Meanwhile, I take my leave."

Calabressa rose; but was persuaded to resume his seat.

"I see," said he, again laughing, "that you have a little time to hear about the two wanderers. Oh, they are in a good hotel, I assure you; pretty rooms; you look over to Capri; quite near you the Castello dell' Ovo, and underneath your windows the waves—a charming view! And the little Natalushka, she has not lost her spirits: she says to me, 'Dear

Mr. Calabressa, will you have the goodness to become my champion?' I say to her, 'Against all the world.' 'Oh no,' she answers, 'not quite so much as that. It is a man who sells coral and lava and such things; and no matter when I go out, he will follow me, and thrust himself before me. Dear Mr. Calabressa, I do not want coral and trinkets; and he is more importunate than all the others put together; and the servants of the hotel can do nothing with him.' Oh, I assure you, it would have made you laugh—her pretence of gravity! I said nothing—not I; what is the use of making serious promises over trifles? But when I went out I encountered the gentleman with the coral and lava ornaments. 'Friend,' said I, 'a word with you. Skip, dance, be off with you to the steps of some other hotel; your presence is not agreeable here.' 'Who are you?' said he, naturally. 'No matter,' said I, 'but do you wish to be presented with two dozen of the schoolmaster's sweetmeats?' 'Who are you?' said he, again. Then I took him by the ear; and whispered something to him. By the blood of Saint Peter, Monsieur Brand, you should have heard the

quick snap of his box, and seen the heels of him as he darted off like an antelope! I tell you, the grave-faced minx, that mocking Natalushka, who makes fun of old people like me—well, she shall not any more be troubled with necklaces and pebbles!"

"Then she is quite cheerful and happy?" said Brand, somewhat wondering.

"Sometimes," Calabressa said, more gravely. "One cannot always be anxious; one has glimpses of hope; then the spirit rises; the eyes laugh. You, for example, you do not seem much cast down?"

Brand avoided his inquisitive look; and merely said—

"One must take things as one finds them. There is no use repining over what happens."

Calabressa now rose, and took his cap. Then he laid it down on the table again.

"One moment before I go, my dear Monsieur Brand. I told you to expect news; perhaps you will not understand. Shall I show you something to help? Regard this: it is only a little trick; but it may help you to understand when the news comes to you."

He took from his pocket a piece of white paper, square, and with apparently nothing on it. He laid it on the table; and produced a red pencil.

"May I trouble you for a small pair of scissors, my dear friend?"

Brand stepped aside to a writing-desk, and brought him the scissors; he was scarcely thinking of Calabressa at all; he was thinking of the message he would send to Naples.

Calabressa slowly and carefully cut the piece of paper into four squares; and proceeded to fold these up. Brand looked on, it is true; but with little interest; and he certainly did not perceive that his companion had folded three of these pieces with the under side inwards, the fourth with the upper side inwards, while this last had the rough edges turned in a different direction from the other three.

"Now, Mr. Brand," said Calabressa, calmly, "if one were drawing lots, for example, what more simple than this? I take one of these pieces—you see, there is nothing on it—I print a red cross with my pencil; there, it is folded again, and they all go into my cap."

"Enough, Calabressa," Brand said, impatiently. "You show me that you have questioned me closely enough. There is enough said about it."

"I ask your pardon, my dear friend, there is not," said Calabressa, politely. "For this is what I have to say now. Draw one of the pieces of paper."

Brand turned away.

"It is not a thing to be gone over again, I tell you; I have had enough of it; let it rest."

"It must not rest. I beg of you—my friend, I insist——"

He pressed the cap on him; Brand, to get rid of him, drew one of the papers, and tossed it on to the table. Calabressa took it up, opened it, and showed him the red cross.

"Yes, you are again unfortunate, my dear Monsieur Brand. Fate pursues you, does it not? But wait one moment. Will you open the other three papers?"

As Brand seemed impatient, Calabressa himself took them out and opened them singly before him. On each and all was the same red mark.

But now Brand was indifferent no longer.

"What do you mean, Calabressa?" he said, quickly.

"I mean," said Calabressa, regarding him, "that one might prepare a trick by which you would not have much chance of escape."

Brand caught him by the arm.

"Do you mean that these others——" He could not complete the sentence; his brain was in a whirl: was this why Natalie had sent him that strange message of hope?

Calabressa released himself, and took his cap, and said—

"I can tell you nothing, my dear friend—nothing. My lips are sealed, for the present. But surely one is permitted to show you a common little trick with bits of paper?"

"But you *must* tell me what you mean," said Brand, breathlessly, and with his face still somewhat pale. "You suggest there has been a trick. That is why you have come from Naples? What do you know? What is about to happen? For God's sake, Calabressa, don't have any mystification about it: what is it that you know—that you suspect—that you have heard?"

"My dear friend," said Calabressa, with some anxiety, "perhaps I have been indiscreet. I know nothing: what can I know? But I show

you a trick—if only to prepare you for any news —and you think it is very serious. Oh no ; do not be too hopeful—do not think it is serious —think it was a foolish trick——"

And so, notwithstanding all that Brand could do to force some definite explanation from him, Calabressa succeeded in getting away, promising to carry to Natalie any message Brand might send in the evening ; and as for Brand himself, it was now time for him to go up to Lisle Street, so that he had something else to think of than idle mystifications.

For this was how he took it in the end. Calabressa was whimsical, fantastic, mysterious; he had been playing with the notion that Brand had been entrapped into this service ; he had succeeded in showing himself how it might have been done. The worst of it was—had he been putting vain hopes into the mind of Natalie? Was this the cause of her message? In the midst of all this bewildering uncertainty, Brand set himself to the work left unfinished by Reitzei ; and found Ferdinand Lind as pleasant and friendly a colleague as ever.

But a few days after he was startled by being

summoned back to Lisle Street, after he had gone home in the afternoon. He found Ferdinand Lind as calm and collected as usual, though he spoke in a hard, dry voice. He was then informed that Lind himself and Beratinsky were about to leave London for a time; that the Council wished Brand to conduct the business at Lisle Street as best he might in their absence; and that he was to summon to his aid such of the officers of the Society as he chose. He asked no explanations; and Lind vouchsafed none. There was something unusual in the expression of the man's face.

Well, Brand installed himself in Lisle Street; and got along as best he could, with the assistance of Gathorne Edwards and one or two others. But not one of them any more than himself knew what had happened or was happening. No word or message of any kind came from Calabressa, or Lind, or the Society, or any one. Day after day, Brand got through his work with patience, but without interest; only, for the time being, these necessities of the hour beguiled him from thinking of the hideous, inevitable thing that lay ahead in his life.

When news did come, it was sudden and terrible. One night he and Edwards were alone in the rooms in Lisle Street when a letter, sent through a roundabout channel, was put into his hands. He opened it carelessly; glanced at the beginning of it; then he uttered an exclamation; then, as he read on, Edwards noticed that his companion's face was ghastly pale, even to his lips.

"Gracious Heavens!—Edwards—read it!" he said, quite breathlessly. He dropped the letter on the table. There was no wild joy at his own deliverance in this man's face; there was terror rather; it was not of himself at all he was thinking, but of the death-agony of Natalie Lind when she should hear of her father's doom.

"Why, this is very good news, Brand," Edwards cried, wondering. "You are released from that affair——"

But then he read further; and he, too, became agitated.

"What? What does it mean? Lind, Beratinsky, Reitzei, accused of conspiracy—misusing the powers entrusted to them as officers of the

Society—Reitzei acquitted on giving evidence—Lind and Beratinsky, condemned!"

Edwards looked at his companion, aghast, and said—

"You know what the penalty is, Brand."

The other nodded. Edwards returned to the letter, reading aloud, in detached scraps, his voice giving evidence of his astonishment and dismay.

"Beratinsky allowed the option of undertaking the duty from which you are released—accepts—it is his only chance, I suppose—poor devil! what chance is it, after all?" He put the letter back on the table. "What is all this that has happened, Brand?"

Brand did not answer. He had risen to his feet; he stood like one bound with chains; there was suffering and an infinite pity in the haggard face.

"Why is not Natalie here?" he said; and it was strange that two men so different from each other as Brand and Calabressa should in such a crisis have had the same instinctive thought. The lives and fates of men were nothing; it was the heart of a girl that con-

cerned them. "They will tell her—some of them over there—they will tell her, suddenly, that her father is condemned to die. Why is she —amongst—amongst strangers?"

He pulled out his watch hastily; but long ago the night-mail had left for Dover. At this moment the bell rang below; and he started; it was unusual for them to have a visitor at such an hour.

"It is only that drunken fool, Kirski," Edwards said. "I asked him to come here to-night."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRIAL.

It was a dark, wet, and cold night when Calabressa felt his way down the gangway leading from the Admiralty Pier into the small Channel steamer that lay slightly rolling at her moorings. Most of the passengers who were already on board had got to leeward of the deck-cabins; and sat huddled up there, undistinguishable bundles of rugs. For a time he almost despaired of finding out Reitzei; but at last he was successful; and he had to explain to this particular bundle of rugs that he had changed his mind, and would himself travel with him to Naples.

It was a dirty night in crossing, and both suffered considerably; the difference being that, as soon as they got into the smooth waters of Calais harbour, Calabressa recovered himself

directly, whereas Reitzei remained an almost inanimate heap of wrappings, and had to be assisted or shoved up the steep gangway into the glare of the officials' lamps. Then, as soon as he had got into a compartment of the railway carriage, he rolled himself up in a corner, and sought to forget his sufferings in sleep.

Calabressa was walking up and down on the platform. At length the horn sounded, and he was about to step into the compartment, when he found himself preceded by a lady.

"I beg your pardon, madame," said he, politely, "but it is a carriage for smokers."

"And if one wishes to smoke, one is permitted—is it not so?" said the stranger, cheerfully.

Calabressa at once held open the door for her; and then followed. These three had the compartment to themselves.

She was a young lady, good-looking, tall, fresh-complexioned, with brown eyes that had plenty of fire in them, and a humorous smile that showed brilliant teeth. Calabressa, sitting opposite her, judged that she was an Austrian, from the number of bags and nick-nacks she had, all

in red Russia leather, and from the number of trinkets she wore, mostly of polished steel or silver. She opened a little tortoise-shell cigarette-case, took out a cigarette, and gracefully accepted the light that Calabressa offered her. By this time the train had started; and was thundering through the night.

The young lady was very frank and affable; she talked to her companion opposite—Reitzei being fast asleep—about a great many things; she lit cigarette after cigarette. She spoke of her husband, moreover; and complained that he should have to go and fight in some one else's quarrel. Why could not ladies who went to the tables at Monte Carlo keep their temper, that a perfectly neutral third person should be summoned to fight a duel on behalf of one of them?

"You are going to rejoin him, then, madame?" said Calabressa.

"Not at all," she said, laughing. "I have my own affairs."

After some time, she said, with an amused smile—

"My dear sir, I hope I do not keep you

from sleeping. But you are puzzled about me. You think you have seen me before; but cannot tell where."

"There you are perfectly right, madame."

"Think of the day before yesterday. You were crossing in the steamer. You were so good as to suggest to a lady on board that nearer the centre of the vessel would be safer for her——"

He stared at her again. Could this be the same lady who, on the day that he crossed, was seated right at the stern of the steamer, her brown hair flying about with the wind, her white teeth flashing as she laughed and joked with the sailors, her eyes full of life and merriment as she pitched up and down? Calabressa, before the paroxysms of his woe overtook him, had had the bravery to go and remonstrate with this young lady, and to tell her she would be more comfortable nearer the middle of the boat; but she had laughingly told him she was a sailor's daughter; and was not afraid of the sea. Well, this handsome young lady opposite certainly laughed like that other—but still?

"Oh," she said, "do I puzzle you with such

a simple thing? My hair was brown the day before yesterday; it is black to-day; is that a sufficient disguise? *Pardieu*, when I went to a music-hall in London that same night, to see some stupid nonsense—bah! such stupid nonsense I have never seen in the world—I went dressed as a man. Only for exercise, you perceive: one does not need disguises in London."

Calabressa was becoming more and more mystified; and she saw it; and her amusement increased.

"Come, my friend," she said, "you cannot deny that you also are political?"

"I, madame?" said Calabressa, with earnest innocence.

"Oh yes. And you are not on the side of the big battalions, eh?"

"I declare to you, madame——"

She glanced at Reitzei.

"Your friend sleeps sound. Come, shall I tell you something? You did not say a word, for example, when you stepped on shore, to a gentleman in a big cloak who had a lantern——"

"Madame, I beg of you!" he exclaimed in a low voice, also glancing at Reitzei.

"What?" she said, laughing. "Then you have the honour of the acquaintance of my old friend Biard? The rogue, to take a post like that! Oh, I think my husband could speak more frankly with you; I can only guess."

"You are somewhat indiscreet, madame," said Calabressa, coldly.

"I? indiscreet?" she said, flicking off the ash of her cigarette with a finger of the small gloved hand. Then she said, with mock-seriousness: "How can one be indiscreet with a friend of the good-man Biard? Come, I will give you a lesson in sincerity. My husband is gone to fight a duel, I told you; yes, but his enemy is a St. Petersburg General, who belonged to the Third Section. They should not let Russians play at Monte Carlo; it is so easy to pick a quarrel with them. And now about myself; you want to know what I am, what I am about. Ah, I perceive it, monsieur. Well, this time, on the other hand, I shall be discreet. But if you hear of something within a few weeks—if the whole of the world begins to chatter about it—and you say, 'Well, that woman had pluck—then you can think of our

little conversation during the night. We must be getting near Amiens, is it not so?"

She took from her travelling-bag a small apparatus for showering eau-de-Cologne in spray, and with this sprinkled her forehead; afterwards removing the drops with a soft white sponge, and smoothing her rebellious black hair. Then she took out a tiny flask and cup of silver.

"Permit me, monsieur, to give you a little cognac, after so many cigarettes. I fear you have only been smoking to keep me company——"

"A thousand thanks, madame," said Calabressa, who certainly did not refuse. She took none herself; indeed, she had just time to put her bags in order again when the train slowed into Amiens Station; and she, bidding her bewildered and bewitched companion a most courteous farewell, got out and departed.

Calabressa himself soon fell asleep; and did not wake until they were near Paris. By this time the bundle of rugs in the corner had begun to show signs of animation.

"Well, friend Reitzei, you have had a good sleep," said Calabressa, yawning and stretching his arms.

"I have slept a little."

"You have slept all night—what more? What do you know, for example, of the young lady who was in the carriage?"

"I saw her come in," Reitzei said, indifferently. "And I heard you talking once or twice. What was she?"

"There you ask me a pretty question. My belief is that she was either one of those Nihilist mad-women, or else the devil himself in a new shape. At any rate she had some good cognac."

"I should like some coffee now, Signor Calabressa; and you?"

"I would not refuse it."

Indeed, during all this journey to Naples, Calabressa and his companion talked much more of the commonplace incidents and wants of travel than of the graver matters that lay before them. Calabressa was especially resolute in doing so. He did not like to look ahead. He kept reminding himself that he was simply the agent of the Council; he was carrying out their behests; the consequences were for others to deal with. He had fulfilled his commission; he

had procured sufficient proof of the suspected conspiracy; if evil-doers were to be punished, was he responsible? *Fiat justitia!*—he kept repeating to himself. He was answerable to the Council alone. He had done his duty.

But from time to time—and especially when they were travelling at night, and he was awake—a haunting dread possessed him. How should he appear before these two women in Naples? His old friend Natalie Berezolyi had been grievously wronged; she had suffered through long years; but a wife forgets much when her husband is about to die. And a daughter? Lind had been an affectionate father enough to this girl; these two had been companions all her lifetime; recent incidents would surely be forgotten in her terror over the fact that it was her own appeal to the Council that had wrought her father's death. And then he, Calabressa, what could he say? It was through him she had invoked these unknown powers. It was his counsel that had taken her to Naples. And he was the immediate instrument that would produce this tragic end.

He would not think of it. At the various

places where they stopped he worried about food and drink; and angrily haggled about hotel-bills. He read innumerable stupid little newspapers from morning till night. He smoked Reitzei nearly blind. At last they reached Naples.

Within an hour after their arrival Calabressa, alone, was in Tommaso's wine-vaults, talking to the ghoul-like occupant. A bell rang, faint and muffled, in the distance; he passed to the back of the vaults, and lit a candle that Tommaso handed him; then he followed what seemed, from the rumble overhead, some kind of subterranean corridor. But at the end of this long subway he began to ascend; then he reached some steps; finally, he was on an ordinary staircase, with daylight around him, and above him a landing with two doors, both shut.

Opening one of these doors, after having knocked thrice, he entered a large, bare chamber which was occupied by three men, all seated at a table which was covered with papers. One of them, Von Zoesch, rose.

"That is good; that is very well settled," he

said to the other two. "It is a good piece of work." Now here is this English business; and the report of our wily friend, Calabressa. What is it, Calabressa? We had your telegram; we have sent for Lind and Beratinsky; what more?"

"Excellency, I have fulfilled your commission, I hope with judgment," Calabressa said, his cap in his hand. "I believe it is clear that the Englishman had that duty put upon him by fraudulent means."

"It is a pity, if it be so; it will cost us some further trouble; and we have other things to think about at present." Then he added, lightly, "But it will please your young lady friend, Calabressa. Well?"

"Excellency, you forget it may not quite so well please her if it is found that her father was in the conspiracy," said Calabressa, submissively.

"Why not?" answered the bluff, tall soldier. "However, to the point, Calabressa. What have you discovered? And your proofs?"

"I have none, your Excellency. But I have brought with me one of the four in the ballot, who is willing to confess. Why is he willing to

confess?" said Calabressa, with a little triumphant smile. "Because he thinks the gentlemen of the Council know already."

"And you have frightened the poor devil, no doubt," said Von Zoesch, laughing.

"I have, on the contrary, assured him of pardon," said Calabressa, gravely. "It is within the powers you gave me, Excellency. I have pledged my honour——"

"Oh yes, yes; very well. But do you mean to tell us, my good Calabressa," said this tall man, speaking more seriously, "that you have proof of these three, Lind, Beratinsky, Reitzei, having combined to impose on the Englishman? Not Lind, surely? Perhaps the other two——?"

"Your Excellency, it is for you to investigate further and determine. I will tell you how I proceeded. I went to the Englishman; and got minute particulars of what occurred. I formed my own little story, my guess, my theory. I got hold of Reitzei; and hinted that it was all known—on my faith, he never thought of denying anything, he was so frightened! But regard this, Excellency; I know nothing. I can give

you the Englishman's account; then, if you get that of Reitzei, and the two correspond, it is a good proof that Reitzei is not lying in his confession? It is for you to examine him, Excellency."

"No, it is not for me," the ruddy-faced soldier-looking man said; and then he turned to his two companions. The one was the Secretary Granaglia; the other was a broad-shouldered, elderly man, with strikingly handsome features of the modern Greek type, a pallid, wax-like complexion, and thoughtful, impenetrable eyes. "Brother Conventz, I withdraw from this affair. I leave it in the hands of the Council; one of the accused was in former days my friend; it is not right that I should interfere."

"And I also, Excellency," said Calabressa, eagerly. "I have fulfilled my commission; may not I retire now also?"

"Brother Granaglia will take down your report in writing; then you are free, my Calabressa. But you will take the summons of the Council to your friend Reitzei; I suppose he will have to be examined before the others arrive."

And so it came about that neither the General von Zoesch nor Calabressa was present when the trial, if trial it could be called, took place. There were no formalities. In this same big bare room, seven members of the Council sat at the table, Brother Conventz presiding, the Secretary Granaglia at the foot, with writing materials before him. Ferdinand Lind and Beratinsky stood between them and the side-wall, apparently impassive. Reitzei was nearer the window, pallid, uneasy, his eyes wandering about the room, but avoiding the place where his former colleagues stood.

The President briefly stated the accusation against them, and read Reitzei's account of his share in what had taken place. He asked if they had anything to deny or explain.

Beratinsky was the first to speak.

"Illustrious Brethren of the Council," he began, as if with some set speech; but his colour suddenly forsook him; and he halted and looked helplessly round. Then he said wildly—"I declare that I am innocent—I say that I am innocent! I never should have thought of it, gentlemen. It was Lind's suggestion; he wished

to get rid of the man; I declare I had nothing to gain. Gentlemen, judge for yourselves: what had I to gain?"

He looked from one to the other; the grave faces there were mostly regarding Granaglia, who was slowly and carefully putting the words down.

Then Lind spoke, clearly and coldly.

"I have nothing to deny. What I did was done in the interests of the Society. My reward, for my long services, is that I am haled here like a pickpocket. It is the second time; it will be the last. I have done, now, with the labour of my life. You can reap the fruits of it. Do with me what you please."

The President rose.

"The gentlemen may now retire; the decision of the Council will be communicated to them hereafter."

A bell was rung; Tommaso appeared; Lind and Beratinsky were conducted down the stairs and through the dark corridor. In a few seconds Tommaso returned, and performed a like office for Reitzei.

The deliberations of the Council were but of short duration. The guilt of the accused was

clear; and clear and positive was the penalty prescribed by the articles of the Society. But in consideration of the fact that Beratinsky had been led into this affair by Lind, it was resolved to offer him the alternative of his taking over the service from which Brand was released. This afforded but a poor chance of escape, but Beratinsky was in a desperate position. That same evening he accepted; and the Secretary Granaglia was forthwith ordered to report the result of these proceedings to England, and give certain instructions as to the further conduct of business there.

The Secretary Granaglia performed this task with his usual equanimity. He was merely a machine registering the decrees of the Council; it was no affair of his to be concerned about the fate of Ferdinand Lind; he had even forgotten the existence of the two women who had been patiently waiting day after day at that hotel, alternately hoping and fearing to learn what had occurred.

CHAPTER XIV.

PUT TO THE PROOF.

It was not at all likely that, at such a crisis, George Brand should pay much attention to the man Kirski, who was now ushered into the room. He left Edwards to deal with him. In any case he could not have understood a word they were saying, except through the interpretation of Edwards, and that was a tedious process. He had other things to think of.

Edwards was in a somewhat nervous and excited condition, after hearing this strange news, and he grew both impatient and angry when he saw that Kirski was again half-dazed with drink.

"Yes, I thought so!" he exclaimed, looking as fierce as the mild student-face permitted. "This is why you were not at the shop when I called to-day. What do you mean by it? What has become of your promises?"

"Little father, I have great trouble," said the man, humbly.

"You?—you in trouble?" said Edwards, angrily. "You do not know what trouble is. You have everything in the world you could wish for. You have good friends; as much employment as you can want; fair wages; and a comfortable home. If your wife ran away from you, isn't it a good riddance? And then instead of setting about your work like a good citizen, you think of nothing but murdering a man who is as far away from you as the man in the moon, and then you take to drinking, and become a nuisance to every one."

"Little father, I have many troubles—and I wish to forget."

"Your troubles!" said Edwards—though his anger was a little bit assumed: he wished to frighten the man into better ways. "What are your troubles! Think of that beautiful lady you are always talking about—who interested herself in you, the bigger fool she!—think of her trouble when she knows that her father is to die. And for what? Because he was not obedient to the laws of the Society. And he is punished with

death ; and you, have you been obedient ? What has become of your promises to me ? "

The man before him seemed at this moment to arouse himself. He answered nothing to the reproaches hurled at him ; but said, with a glance of eager interest in the sunken eyes—

" Is she in great trouble, little father ? "

This gleam of intelligence rather startled Edwards. He had been merely scolding a half-drunken poor devil ; and had been incautious as to what he said. He continued, with greater discretion—

" Would she have her troubles made any the less if she knew how you were behaving ? She was interested in you ; many a time she asked about you——"

" Yes, yes," the man said, slowly ; and he was twisting about the cap that he held in his hand.

" And she gave you her portrait. Well, I am glad you knew you were not fit to retain such a gift. A young lady like that does not give her portrait to be taken into public-houses——"

" No more—do not say any more, little father," Kirski said, though in the same humble way. " It is useless."

"Useless!"

"I will not go back to any public-house—never."

"So you said to me four days ago!" Edwards answered.

"This time it is true," he said, though he did not lift his bleared eyes. "To-morrow I will take back the portrait, little father; it shall remain with me; in my room. I do not go back to any public-house; I shall be no more trouble." Then he said, timidly raising his eyes: "Does she weep—that beautiful one?"

"Yes, no doubt," said Edwards, hastily and in some confusion. "Is it not natural? But you must not say a word about it; it is a secret; think of it, and what one has to suffer in this world; and then ask yourself if you will add to the trouble of one who has been so kind to you. Now do I understand you aright? Is it a definite promise this time."

"This time, yes, little father. You will have no more need to complain of me. I will not add to any one's trouble. To-morrow—no, to-night, I take back the portrait; it is sacred; I will not add to any one's trouble."

There was something strange about the man's manner; but Edwards put it down to the effects of drink; and was chiefly concerned in impressing on the dazed intelligence before him the responsibility of the promises he had given.

"To-morrow, then, at nine you are at the shop."

"Assuredly, if you wish it, little father."

"Remember, it is the last chance your master will give you. He is very kind to give you this chance. To-morrow you begin a new course of conduct; and when the young lady comes back, I will tell her of it."

"I will not add to her troubles, little father; you may be sure of it this time."

When he had gone, Brand turned to his companion. He still held that letter in his hands. His face, that had grown somewhat haggard of late, was even paler than usual.

"I suppose I ought to feel very glad, Edwards," he said. "This is a reprieve, don't you see, so far as I am concerned. And yet I can't realize it; I don't seem to care about it; all the bitterness was over——"

"You are too bewildered yet, Brand—no wonder."

"If only the girl and her mother were over here," he said; and then he added, with a quick instinct of fear: "What will she say to me? When she appealed to the Council, surely she could not have imagined that the result would be her father's death. But now that she finds it so —when she finds that, in order to rescue me, she has sacrificed him——"

He could not complete the sentence.

"But he has richly deserved it," said Edwards.

"That is not what she will look to," he said. "Edwards," he added, presently, "I am going home now. This place stifles me. I hate the look of it. That table is where they played their little sleight-of-hand business; and oh! the bravery of the one, and the indifference of the other, and Lind's solemn exposition of duty and obedience and all the rest of it! Well, what will be the result when this pretty story becomes known? Rascality among the very foremost officers of the Society: what are all those people who have recently joined us, who are thinking of joining us, likely to say? Are these your High Priests? Are these the apostles of self-sacrifice, and all the virtues?"

"It is bad enough; but not irreparable," said Edwards, calmly. "If a member here or there falls out, the association remains; if one of its high officers betrays his trust, you see how swift and terrible the punishment is."

"I do not," said Brand. "I see that the paper decree is swift enough; but what about the execution of it. Have the Council a body of executioners?"

"I don't know about that," said Edwards, simply. "But I know that when I was in Naples with Calabressa, I heard of the fate of several against whom decrees had been pronounced. And I know that in every instance they anticipated their own fate; the horror of being continually on the watch was too much for them. You may depend on it, that is what Lind will do. He is a proud man. He will not go slinking about, afraid at every street-corner of the knife of the Little Chaffinch or some other of those Camorra fellows——"

"Edwards," said Brand, hastily, "there is a taint of blood—of treachery—about this whole affair that sickens me. It terrifies me when I think of what lies ahead. I—I think I have

already tasted death; and the taste is still bitter in the mouth. I must get into the fresh air."

Edwards got his coat and hat and followed. He saw that his companion was strangely excited.

"If all this work—if all we have been looking forward to—were to turn out to be a delusion," Brand said, hurriedly, when they had got into the dark clear night outside, "that would be worse than the suicide of Ferdinand Lind or the disappearance of Beratinsky. If this is to be the end—if these are our companions——"

"But how can you suggest such a thing?" Edwards protested. "Your imagination is filled with blackness, Brand. You are disturbed; shocked; afraid. Why, who are your colleagues? What do you think of——" Here he mentioned a whole string of names, some of them those of well-known Englishmen. "Do you accuse them of treachery? Have you not perfect confidence in them? Have they not perfect confidence in the work we are all pledged to?"

But he could not shake off this horrible feeling. He wished to be alone, to fight with it; he did not even think of going to Lord Evelyn; perhaps it was now too late. Shortly afterwards he

bade Edwards good night; and made his way to his rooms at the foot of Buckingham Street.

Waters had left the lights low; he did not turn them up. Outside lay the black night-world of London, hushed and silent, with its thousand golden points of fire. He was glad to be alone.

And yet an unknown feeling of dread was upon him. It seemed as if now for the first time he realized what a terrible destiny had nearly been his; and that his escape, so far from rendering him joyful, had left him still trembling and horrified. Hitherto his pride had conquered. Even as he had undertaken that duty, it was his pride that had kept him outwardly calm and indifferent. He would not show fear, he would not even show repugnance, before these men. And it was pride, too, that had taught him at length and successfully to crush down certain vague rebellions of conscience. He would not go back from his oath. He would not go back from the promise to which Natalie's ring bound him. He would go through with this thing, and bid farewell to life; further than that no one could have demands on him.

But the sudden release from this dire pressure of will left his nerves somewhat unstrung. For the mere sake of companionship he would like to have taken Natalie's hand, to have heard her voice; that would have assured him, and given him courage. He knew not what dangers encompassed her; what agony she might not be suffering. And the night did not answer these sudden, wavering, confused questionings; the darkness outside was as silent as the grave.

Then a deeper gloom, almost touching despair, fell upon him. He saw in all those companions of his only so many dupes; the great hope of his life left him; the future became blank. He began to persuade himself that he had only toyed with that new-found faith; that it was the desperation of *ennui*, not a true hope, that had drawn him into this work; that henceforth he would have no right to call upon others to join in a vain undertaking. If such things as had just occurred were possible in this organization with all its lofty aims and professions—if there was to be a background of assassination and conspiracy—why, this dream must go as others had done. Then what remained to him in life?

He almost wished he had been allowed to go forward to this climax unknowing; to have gone with his heart still filled with faith; to be assured until the last moment that Natalie would remember how he had fulfilled his promise to her.

It was a dark night for him, within and without. But as he sat there at the window, or walked up and down, wrestling with these demons of doubt and despair, a dull blue light gradually filled the sky outside; the orange stars on the bridges grew less intense; the broad river became visible in the dusk. Then, by-and-by, the dull blue cleared into a pale steely-grey; and the forms of the boats could be made out, anchored in the stream there; these were the first indications of the coming dawn.

Somehow or other he ceased these restless pacings of his, and was attracted to the window, though he gazed but absently on the slow change taking place outside—the world-old wonder of the new day rising in the east. Up into that steely-grey glides a soft and luminous saffron-brown; it spreads and widens; against it the far dome of St. Paul's becomes a beautiful velvet-purple. A planet, that had been golden when it was in

the dusk near the horizon, has now sailed up into the higher heaven, and shines a clear silver point. And now—listen!—the hushed and muffled sounds in the silence—the great city is awakening from its sleep—there is the bark of a dog—the rumble of a cart is heard. And still that saffron-red spreads and kindles in the east; and the dome of St. Paul's is richer in hue than ever; the river, between the black-grey bridges, shines now with a cold light; and the gas-lamps have grown pale. And then the final flood of glory wells up in the eastern skies; and all around him the higher buildings catch here and there a swift golden gleam: the sunrise is declared; there is a new day born for the sons and the daughters of men.

The night had fled; and with it the hideous phantoms of the night. It seemed to him that he had escaped from the grave; and that he was only now shaking off the horror of it. Look at the beautiful, clear colours without; listen to the hum of the city awakening to all its cheerful activities; the new day has brought with it new desires, new hopes. He threw open the windows; the morning air was cold and

sweet. The sparrows were beginning to chirp in the garden-plots below. Surely that black night was over and gone.

If only he could see Natalie—for one moment—to assure her that he had succumbed, but once, and for the last time, to despair. It was a confession he was bound to make; it would not lessen her trust in him. For now all through his soul a sweet clear voice was ringing; it was the song the sunrise had brought him; it was the voice of Natalie herself, with all its proud pathos and fervour, as he had heard it in the olden days:

"A little time we gain from time
To set our seasons in some chime,
For harsh or sweet or loud or low,
With seasons played out long ago
And souls that in their time and prime
Took part with summer or with snow,
Lived abject lives out or sublime,
And had their chance of seed to sow
For service or disservice done
To those days dead and this their son.

"A little time that we may fill
Or with such good works or such ill
As loose the bonds or make them strong
Wherein all manhood suffers wrong.
By rose-hung river and light-foot rill
There are who rest not; who think long

Till they discern as from a hill
At the sun's hour of morning song,
Known of souls only, and those souls free,
The sacred spaces of the sea."

Surely it was still for him and her together to stand on some such height, hand in hand, and watch the sunrise come over the sea and the awakening world. They would forget the phantoms of the night; and the traitors gone down to Erebus; perhaps, for this new life together, they might seek a new clime. There was work for them still; and faith, and hope, and the constant assurance of love; the future might perchance be all the more beautiful because of these dark perils of the past.

As he lay thus communing with himself, the light shining in on his haggard face, Waters came into the room, and was greatly concerned to find that, not only had his master not been to bed, but that the supper left out for him the night before had not been touched. Brand rose, without betraying any impatience over his attendant's pertinacious enquiries and remonstrances. He went and got writing materials, and wrote as follows :—

"DEAR EVELYN,

"If you could go over to Naples for me—at once—I would take it as a great favour. I cannot go myself. Whether or not, come to see me at Lisle Street, to-day, by twelve. Yours,

"G. B."

"Take this to Lord Evelyn, Waters; and if he is up get an answer."

"But your breakfast, sir. God bless me——"

"Never mind breakfast. I am going to lie down for an hour or two now; I have had some business to think over. Let me have some breakfast about eleven—when I ring."

"Very well, sir."

That was his phrase—he had had some business to think over. But it seemed to him, as he went into the adjacent room, that that night he had passed through worse than the bitterness of death.

CHAPTER XV.

CONGRATULATIONS.

THE Secretary Granaglia, the business of the Council being over, carried the news to Von Zoesch. It was almost dark when he made his way up the steep little terraces in the garden of the villa at Posilipo. He found the tall General seated at the entrance to the grotto-like retreat, smoking a cigar in the dusk.

"You are late, Granaglia," he said.

"I had some difficulty in coming here," said the little man with the sallow face and the tired eyes. "The police are busy; or pretending to be. The Commendatore tells me that Zaccatelli has been stirring them up."

"Zaccatelli!" said Von Zoesch, with a little laugh. "It will soon be time now for Zaccatelli to come down from his perch. Well, now, what is the result?"

Granaglia briefly recounted what had occurred: the other manifested no surprise.

"So this is the end of the Lind episode," he said, thoughtfully. "It is a pity that so able a man should be thrown away. He has worked well; I know of no one who will fill his place; but that must be seen to at once, Granaglia. How long have they given him?"

"A month, your Excellency. He wishes to go back to England, to put his affairs in order. He has a firm nerve."

"He was a good-looking man when he was young," said Von Zoesch, apparently to himself. Then he added: "This Beratinsky, to whom the Zaccatelli affair has been transferred: what do you think of him? There must be no bungling, Granaglia. What do you think of him: is he to be trusted?"

"Your Excellency, if I were to give you my own impression, I should say not in the least. He accepts this service—why? Because he is otherwise lost for certain; and here is a chance. It is perhaps better than nothing. But he does not go forward with any conviction of duty: what is he thinking but of his chance of running away?"

"And perhaps running away beforehand, for example?"

"Oh no, your Excellency; at least, that has been provided for. Caprone and the brother of Caprone will wait upon him until the thing is over; and what is more he will receive a hint that these two humble attendants of his are keeping an eye on him."

"Caprone dare not go to Rome?"

"He is ready to go anywhere. They might as well try to lay hands on a ghost."

Von Zoesch rose, and stretched his huge frame, and yawned.

"So this is the end of the episode Lind," he said, idly. "It is a pity. But if a man plays a risky game, and loses, he must pay. Perhaps the warning will be wholesome, Granaglia. Our friends must understand that our laws are not laid down for nothing; and that we are not afraid to punish offenders even if these be among ourselves. I suppose there is nothing further to be done to-night?"

"I would ask your Excellency to remain here for a little time yet," said the Secretary.

"Are they coming so near? We must get

Calabressa to procure some of them a dozen or two on board the schooner. However——"

He sat down again, and lit another cigar.

"We must pay Calabressa a compliment, Granaglia; it was well done; very clever; it has all turned out just as he imagined; it is not the first time he has done us good service, with all his volubility. Oh yes; the rascal knows when to hold his tongue. At this moment, for example, he refuses to open his lips."

"Pardon, your Excellency; but I do not understand you."

The General laughed a little, and continued talking—it was one way of passing the time.

"It is a good joke enough. The wily old Calabressa saw pretty clearly what the decision of the Council would be; and so he comes to me and entreats me to be the bearer of the news to Madame Lind and her daughter. Oh yes; it is good news, this deliverance of the Englishman; Madame Lind is an old friend of mine; she and her daughter will be grateful. But you perceive, Granaglia, that what the cunning old dog was determined to avoid was the reporting to Madame Lind that her husband had been sentenced.

That was no part of the original programme. And now Calabressa holds his mouth shut; he keeps out of the way; it is left for me to go and inform the mother and daughter."

His voice became more serious.

"The devil take it, it is no pleasant task at all. One is never sure how the brain of a woman will work: you start the engine; but it may plunge back the wrong way, and strike you. Calabressa is afraid. The fox is hiding in some hole until it is all over."

"Cannot I be of service, your Excellency?" the Secretary said.

"No, no; but I thank you, friend Granaglia. It is a delicate matter; it must be approached with circumspection; and I, as an old acquaintance of Madame Lind, ought not to shirk the duty."

Apparently, it was not Calabressa only who had some dread of the difficulties of news-bearer.

"It is impossible for your Excellency to go near the hotel, at present," said the Secretary, promptly.

But his chief refused to accept this offered means of escape.

"That is true; but it is not a difficulty. To-night, friend Granaglia, you will send a message to the hotel, bidding them be at the Villa Odelscalchi to-morrow morning at eleven; you understand?"

"Certainly, your Excellency."

"Then I will meet them; and take the risk. Everything must be settled off at once; we have wasted too much time over this affair, Granaglia. When does the Genoa Council meet?"

"On the seventh."

"To-morrow you must issue the summonses. Come, Granaglia, let us be stirring; it is cold. Where does Brother Conventz sleep to-night?"

"On board the schooner, your Excellency."

"I also. To-morrow, at eleven, you will be at Portici; to-night you will send the message to the two ladies at the hotel; and also, if you can, find out where that rogue Calabressa is hiding."

That was the last of their talking. There was some locking up inside; then they passed down through the dark garden, and out into the road. There was no one visible. They walked on in silence.

Punctually at eleven the next morning, Natalie and her mother appeared at the iron gates of the Villa Odelscalchi; and rang the bell. The porter appeared, admitted them, and then turned to the great white staircase, which Granaglia was at that moment seen to be descending.

"Will the ladies have the goodness to step into the garden?" said the Secretary, with grave courtesy. "General von Zoesch will be with them directly."

He accompanied them as far as the top of the terrace; and then bowed, and withdrew.

If Natalie Lind was agitated now, it was not with fear. There was a fresh animation of colour in her cheek; her eyes were brilliant and excited; she spoke in low, eager whispers.

"Oh, I know what he is coming to tell us, mother—you need not be afraid—I shall see it in his face before he comes near—I think I shall be able to hear it in the sound of his steps. Have courage, mother: why do you tremble so? Remember what Calabressa said. They are so powerful; they can do everything; and you and the General von Zoesch old friends too. Look at this, mother: do you see what I have brought with me?"

She opened her purse—her fingers were certainly a little nervous—and showed her mother a folded-up telegraph-form.

"I am going to telegraph to him, mother; surely it is from me he should hear the news first? And then he might come here, mother, to go back with us; you will rest a few days after so much anxiety."

"I hope, my darling, it will all turn out well," said the mother, turning quickly as she heard footsteps.

The next second Von Zoesch appeared; his face red with embarrassment; but still Natalie with her first swift glance saw that his eyes were smiling and friendly, and her heart leapt up with a bound.

"My dear young lady," said he, taking her hand, "forgive me for making such a peremptory appointment——"

"But you bring good news," she said, breathlessly. "Oh, sir, I can see that you have succeeded—yes, yes—the danger is removed—you have saved him——"

"My dear young lady," said he, smiling, but still greatly embarrassed, "it is my good fortune

to be able to congratulate you. Ah, I thought that would bring some brightness to your eyes——"

She raised his hand, and kissed it twice, passionately.

"Mother," she said, in a wild, joyful way, "will you not thank him for me? I do not know what I am saying—and then——"

The General had turned to her mother. Natalie quickly took out the telegraph-form, unfolded it, knelt down and put it on the garden-seat, and with trembling fingers wrote her message. "*You are saved. Come to us at once; my mother and I wait here for you*"—that was the substance of it. Then she rose; and for a second or two stood irresolute, silent, and shame-faced. Happily no one had noticed her. These two had gone forward; and were talking together in a low voice. She did not join them; she could not have spoken then, her heart was throbbing so violently with its newly found joy.

"Stefan," said the mother, and there was a pleasant light in her sad eyes too, "I shall never forget the gratitude we owe you. I have nothing else to regard now but my child's happiness. You have saved her life to her."

"Yes, yes," he said, in stammering haste, "I am glad the child is happy. It would be a pity, at her time of life, and such a beautiful, brave young lady—yes, it would be a pity if she were to suffer—I am very glad. But there is another side to the question, Natalie. It refers to you. I have not such good news for you—that is, it depends on how you take it—but it is not good news—it will trouble you—only, it was inevitable——"

"What do you mean?" she said, calmly.

"Your husband——" he said, regarding her somewhat anxiously.

"Yes?" she said, without betraying any emotion.

"Well, you understand, we had not the power to release your English friend unless there had been injustice—or worse—in his being appointed. There was. More than that, it was very nearly a repetition of the old story. Your husband was again implicated."

She merely looked at him, waiting for him to continue.

"And the Council," he said, more embarrassed than ever, "had to try him for his complicity. He was tried—and—condemned"

"To what?" she said, quite calmly.

"You must know, Natalie. He loses his life."

She turned very pale.

"It was not so before——" she managed to say, though her breath came and went quickly.

"It was. But then he was pardoned. This time there is no hope."

She stood silent for a second or two; then she said, regarding him with a sad look—

"You think me heartless, Stefan. You think I ought to be overwhelmed with grief. But—but I have been kept from my child for seventeen years. I have lived with the threat of the betrayal of my father hanging over me. The affection of a wife cannot endure everything. Still, I am—sorry——"

Her eyes were cast down; and they slowly filled with tears. Von Zoesch breathed more freely. He was eagerly explaining to her how this result had become inevitable; how he himself had had no participation in it; and so forth—when Natalie Lind stepped quickly up to them, looking from the one to the other. She saw something was wrong.

"Mother, what is it?" she said, in vague fear. She turned to Von Zoesch. "Oh, sir, if there is something you have not told me—if there is trouble—why was it not to me that you spoke?"

She took hold of her mother's hand.

"Mother, what is it?

"My dear young lady," said Von Zoesch, interposing, "you know that life is made up of both bitter and sweet——"

"I wish to know, signore," she said, proudly, "what it is you have told my mother. If there is trouble, it is for her daughter to share it."

"Well, then, dear young lady, I will tell you," he said, "though it will grieve you also. I must explain to you. You cannot suppose that the happy news I delivered to you was the result of the will of any one man, or number of men. No. It was the result of the application of law and justice. Your—sweetheart, shall I call him?—was entrusted with a grave duty, which would most probably have cost him his life. In the ordinary way, no one could have released him from it, however much certain friends of yours here might have been interested in you, and

grieved to see you unhappy. But there was this possibility—it was even a probability—that he had been selected for this service unfairly. Then, no doubt, if that could be proved, he ought to be released."

"Yes—yes," she said, impatiently.

"That was proved. Unfortunately, I have to tell you that among those convicted of this conspiracy was your father. Well, the laws of our association are strict—they are even terrible where a delinquent is in a position of high responsibility. My dear young lady, I must tell you the truth; your father has been adjudged guilty—and—and the punishment is—death."

She uttered a quick, short cry of alarm; and turned, with frightened eyes, to her mother.

"Mother, is it true?—is it true?"

The mother did not answer; she had clasped her trembling hands. Then the girl turned; there was a proud passion in her voice.

"Oh, sir, what tiger is there amongst you that is so athirst for blood! You save one man's life—after intercession and prayer, you save one man's life, only to seize on that of another. And

it is to me, it is to me, his daughter, that you come—with congratulations! I am only a child; I am to be pleased; you speak of a sweetheart; but you do not tell me that you are about to murder my father! You give me my lover; in exchange you take my father's life: is there a woman in all the world so despicable as to accept her happiness at such a cost?"

Involuntarily she crushed up the telegram she held in her hand; and threw it away from her.

"It is not I, at all events," she exclaimed. "Oh, signore, you should not have mocked me with your congratulations. That is not the happiness you should offer to a daughter. But you have not killed him yet; there is time; let things be as they were—that is what my sweetheart, as you call him, will say; he and I are not afraid to suffer. Surely rather that than that he should marry a girl so heartless and cowardly as to purchase her happiness at the cost of her father's life!"

"My dear young lady," he said, with a great pity and concern in his face, "I can assure you what you think of is impossible. What is done cannot be undone."

Her proud indignation now gave way to terror.

"Oh no, signore, you cannot mean that! I cannot believe it. You have saved one man — oh, signore, for the love of Heaven, this other also! Have pity! How can I live, if I know that I have killed my father!"

He took both her hands in his, and strove to soothe down her wild terror and dismay. He declared to her she had nothing to do with it; no more than himself; that her father had been tried by his colleagues; that, if he had not been, a fearful act of treachery would have been committed. She listened, or appeared to listen; but her lips were pale; her eyes had a strange look in them; she was breathless.

"Calabressa said they were all-powerful," she interrupted suddenly. "But they are all-powerful to slay only? Oh no, I cannot believe it! I will go to them; it cannot be too late; I will say to them that I would rather have died than have appealed to them, if I had known that this was to be the terrible result. And Calabressa— why did he not warn me? Or is he one of the bloodthirsty ones also—one of the tigers that

crouch in the dark? Oh, signore, if they are all-powerful, they are all-powerful to pardon—may I not go to themselves——?"

"It would be useless, my dear signorina," said Von Zoesch, with deep compassion in his voice. "I am sorry to grieve you; but justice has been done; and the decision is past recall. And do not blame poor old Calabressa——"

At this moment the bell of the outer gate rang, echoing through the empty house, and he started somewhat.

"Come, child," said her mother. "We have taken up too much of your time, Stefan. I wish there had been no drawback to your good news."

"At the present moment," he said, glancing somewhat anxiously towards the building, "I cannot ask you to stay, Natalie. But on some other occasion, and as soon as you please, I will give you any information you may wish. Remember, you have good friends here."

Natalie suffered herself to be led away. She seemed too horror-stricken to be able to speak. Von Zoesch accompanied them only to the terrace; and there bade them good-bye. Granaglia was waiting to show them to the gate. A

few moments afterwards they were in their carriage, returning to Naples.

They sat silent for some time; the mother regarding her daughter anxiously.

"Natalushka, what are you thinking of?"

The girl started: her eyes were filled with a haunting fear, as if she had just seen some terrible thing. And yet she spoke slowly, and sadly, and wistfully:

"I was thinking, mother, that perhaps it was not so hard to be condemned to die; for then there would come an end to one's suffering. And I was wondering whether there had been many women in the world who had to accuse themselves of taking a part in bringing about their own father's death. Oh, I hope not—I hope not!"

A second afterwards she added, with more than the bitterness of tears in her trembling voice, "And—and I was thinking of General Von Zoesch's congratulations, mother."

CHAPTER XVI.

A COMMISSION.

LORD EVELYN obeyed his friend's summons in considerable anxiety, if not even alarm; for he made no doubt that it had some connection with that mysterious undertaking to which Brand was pledged. But when he reached Lisle Street, and was shown into the larger room, no very serious business seemed going forward. Two or three of the best-known to him among the English members of the Society were present, grouped round a certain Irish M.P., who, with twinkling eyes but otherwise grave face, was describing the makeshifts of some provincial manager or other who could not pay his company their weekly salary. To the further surprise of the new-comer, also, Mr. Lind was absent; his chair was occupied by Gathorne Edwards.

He was asked to go into an inner room; and there he found Brand, looking much more like himself than he had done for some time back.

"It is awfully kind of you, Evelyn, to come at once. I heard you had returned to town yesterday. Well, what of the old people down in Wiltshire?"

Lord Evelyn was quite thrown off his guard by this frank cheerfulness. He forgot the uneasy forebodings with which he had left his house.

"Oh, capital old people!" he said, putting his hat and umbrella on the table. "Excellent. But you see, Brand, it becomes a serious question if I have to bury myself in the country, and drink port-wine after dinner, and listen to full-blown, full-fed glorious old Tories, every time a sister of mine gets engaged to be married. And now that Rosalys has begun it, they'll all take to it; one after the other, like sheep jumping a ditch.'

"They say Milbanke is a very nice young fellow," said Brand.

"Petted, a little. But then, an only son, and heaps of money: perhaps it's natural. I know he is a ghastly hypocrite," added Lord Evelyn,

who seemed to have some little grudge against his brother-in-law in prospect. "It was too bad of him to go egging on those old megatheria to talk politics, until they were red in the face, denouncing Free Trade, and abusing the Ballot, and foretelling the ruin of the farmer as soon as the Education Act began to work. Then he pretended to be on their side——"

"What did you do?"

"I sat quiet. I was afraid I might be eaten. I relapsed into contemplation; and began to compose a volume on 'Tory Types: Some Survivals in English Politics. For the Information of Town Readers.'"

"Well, now you have done your duty, and cemented the alliance between the two families—by drinking port-wine, I suppose—what do you say to a little pleasure-trip?"

"Oh, is that all?" he said, looking up quickly. "Is that what your note meant?"

"The fact is, Evelyn," he said, with a trifle of embarrassment, "Natalie and her mother are in Naples—and I don't know precisely in what circumstances. I am a little anxious about them—I should like to know more of their surroundings

—why, for one thing, I don't know whether they have any money even. I would go over myself, Evelyn; but the truth is, I cannot—not very well. At least, I ought not to go; and I thought, if you had time—being an old friend of Natalie's—you would like to see that she was all right——"

"Where is Lind?" said Lord Evelyn, suddenly.

"Lind is in Italy also," said Brand, evasively.

"Not with them?"

"Oh no."

There was rather an awkward silence. At length Brand said—

"Something very serious has happened, Evelyn; and the question is whether, in the interests of the Society, it should not be kept a secret, if it is possible."

"I do not wish to know any secret," Lord Evelyn said, simply. "I am willing to go over to Naples at once, if I can be of any service."

"It is very kind of you; I thought you would say as much," Brand said—still hesitating. "But then I doubt whether you could be of much

service unless you understood the whole situation of affairs. At present only two over here know what has occurred—Edwards and myself. . . . Yes; I think you must know also. Read this letter; it came only last night."

He unlocked a drawer; took out a letter, and gave it to Lord Evelyn, who read it slowly. When he had finished, he put it on the table, without a word.

"You understand?" Brand said, calmly. "That means that Lind is to be punished with death, for treachery. Don't think about me; I've had a narrow escape; but I have escaped—thanks to Natalie's courage and decision. What I am concerned about is the effect that such a disclosure might have on the fortunes of the Society. Would it not provoke a widespread feeling of distrust? Wouldn't there always be a suspicion——?"

"But you yourself, Brand!" Evelyn exclaimed, in amazement. "Why, you—I thought you would have been the first to resign—after such an escape——"

"I have fought all through that, Evelyn," he said, absently. "It was my first impulse—I con-

fess it. The thought of being associated with such men sickened me; I despaired; I wished they had never been found out; and that I had been let blindly go on to the end. Well, I got over the fit—with a struggle. It was not reasonable, after all. Surely one's belief in the future of the Society ought to be all the firmer that these black sheep have been thrust out? As for myself, at all events, I ought to have more hope, not less. I never did trust Lind, as you know; I believed in his work, in the usefulness of it, and the prospects of its success; but I never was at ease in his presence; I was glad to get away to my own work in the north. And now, with the way clearer, why should one think of giving up? To tell you the truth, Evelyn, I would give anything to be in America at the present moment, if only Natalie and her mother were in safety. There is a chance for us there bigger than anything Lind ever dreamed about. You know the Granges—the associations of the 'Patrons of Husbandry,' that were founded by the Scotchman Saunders? It is an immense social organization; the success of it has been quite unprecedented; they have an immense power in their hands

And it isn't only agriculture they deal with; they touch on politics here and there; they control elections; and the men they choose are invariably men of integrity. Well, now, don't you see this splendid instrument ready made? From what I hear from Philadelphia——"

Lord Evelyn's thoughts were elsewhere than in Philadelphia.

"You must tell me about yourself, Brand!" he exclaimed. "Your life is no longer in danger, then? How has it happened?"

"Oh," said Brand, somewhat carelessly, "I don't know all the particulars as yet. What I do know is that Natalie and her mother disappeared from London; I had no idea whither they had gone. Then Calabressa turned up; and I heard that Natalie had appealed to the Council —fancy, she, a young girl, had the courage to go and appeal to the Council! Then Calabressa suspected something—I saw by his questions; then Lind, Beratinsky, and Reitzei appear to have been summoned to Naples. The result is in that letter; that is about all I know."

"And these others in there?" said Lord Evelyn, glancing to the door.

"They know nothing at all. That is what I am uncertain about. Whether to leave the disappearance of Lind unaccounted for—merely saying he had been summoned away by the Council; or to let everybody who may hear of it understand that, powerful as he was, he had to succumb to the laws of the Society, and accept the penalty for his error. I am quite uncertain; I have no instructions. You might find out for me in Naples, Evelyn, if you went over there—you might find out what they consider advisable."

"You are in Lind's place, then?"

"Not at all," said he, quickly, and with a slight flush. "Edwards and I are merely keeping the thing going, until matters are settled. Did you notice whether Molyneux was in the next room when you came through?"

"Yes; he was."

"Then excuse me for a minute or two. I want to speak to you further about Naples."

Brand was gone some time; and Lord Evelyn was left to ponder over these strange tidings. To him they were very joyful tidings; for ever since that communication was made to him of the

danger that threatened his friend's life, he had been haunted by the recollection that, but for him, Brand would in all probability have never heard of this association. It was with an infinite sense of personal relief that he now knew this danger was past. Already he saw himself on his way to Naples, to find out the noble girl who had taken so bold a step to save her lover. Not yet had darkness fallen over these two lives.

Brand returned; carefully shut the door after him; and seated himself on a corner of the table.

"You see, Evelyn," he said, quite in his old matter-of-fact way, "I can't pretend to have very much regret over what has happened to Lind. He tried to do me an ill turn; and he has got the worst of it; that is all. On the other hand, I bear him no malice; you don't want to hurt a man when he is down; I can guess that it isn't the death-penalty that he is thinking most of now. I can even make some excuse for him—now that I see the story plain. The temptation was great; always on the understanding that he was against my marrying his daughter; and that I had been

sure of for some time. To punish me for not giving up my property; to keep Natalie to himself; and to get this difficult duty securely undertaken, all at once: it was worth while trying for. But his way of going about it was shabby. It was a mean trick. Well, there is nothing more to be said on that point: he has played—played a foul game—and lost."

He added, directly afterwards—

"So you think you can go to Naples?"

"Certainly," said Evelyn, with promptness. "You don't know how glad I am about this, Brand. If you had come to grief over your relations with this Society, it would have been like a millstone hanging on my conscience all my life. And I shall be delighted to go to Italy for you. I should like to see the look on Natalie's face."

"You will probably find her in great trouble," Brand said, gravely.

"In trouble?"

"Naturally. Don't you see, Evelyn, she could not have foreseen that the result of her appeal would involve the destruction of her father.

It is impossible to believe that she could have foreseen that. I know her; she would not have stirred hand or foot. And now that this has been discovered, it is not her father's guilt she will be thinking of; it is his fate, brought about indirectly by herself. You may be sure, Evelyn, she will not be overjoyed at the present moment. All the more reason why one who knows her should be near her; I have no idea what sort of people are about her; I should be more satisfied if I knew you were there."

"I am ready to go; I am ready to start this afternoon, as I say," Evelyn repeated; but then he added with some hesitation: "But I am not going to play the part of a hypocrite, Brand. I could not pretend to sympathize with her, if that is the cause of her trouble. I should tell her it served her father right."

"You could not be so brutal, if you tried, Evelyn," Brand said. "You might think so. You could not tell her so. But I have no fear. You will be discreet enough, and delicate enough, when you see her."

"And what am I to say from you?"

"From me?" he said. "Oh, you can say I thank her for having saved my life. That will be enough, I think. She will understand the rest."

"I mean, what you advise her to do? Ought they to return to England?"

"I think so, certainly. Most likely she will be waiting there, trying to get the Council to reverse the sentence. Having been successful in the one case, the poor child may think she ought to succeed in the other. I fear that is too much to expect. However, if she is anxious, she may try. I should like to know there was somebody near her she could rely on—don't you understand, Evelyn?—to see that she is situated and treated as you would like one of your own sisters to be——"

"I see what it is, Brand," Lord Evelyn said, laughing, "you are jealous of the foreigners. You think they will be using toothpicks in her presence, and that kind of thing——"

"I wish to know that she and her mother are in a good hotel," said Brand, simply, "with proper rooms, and attendance, and—and a carriage—women can't go walking through those

beastly streets of Naples. The long and the short of it is, Evelyn," he added, with some embarrassment, as he took out from his pocket-book two blank cheques, and sat down at the table and signed them, "I want you to play the part of big brother to them, don't you know? And you will have to exercise skill as well as force. Don't you see, Calabressa is the best of fellows; but he would think nothing of taking them to stay in some vile restaurant, if the proprietor were politically inclined——"

"Yes, yes; I see: garlic; cigarettes during breakfast, right opposite the ladies; wine-glasses used as finger-glasses: well, you are a thorough Englishman, Brand!"

"I suppose when your sisters go abroad, you see that they are directed to a proper hotel?" said Brand, somewhat angrily.

"I know this," said Evelyn, laughing, "that my sisters, and you, and Calabressa, and myself, all boiled together, wouldn't make half as good a traveller as Natalie Lind is. Don't you believe she has been led away into any slummy place, for the sake of politics or anything else. I will

bet she knows the best hotels in Naples as well as you do the Waldegrave Club."

"At any rate, you've got to play the big brother, Evelyn; and it is my affair, of course; I will not allow you to be out of pocket by it. Here are two cheques; you can fill them in over there when you see how matters stand; ——, at Rome, will cash them."

"Do you mean to say I have to pay their hotel-bills?"

"If they have plenty of money, certainly not. But you must find out. You must take the bull by the horns. It is far more likely that they have so little money that they may be becoming anxious. Then you must use a firm hand—I mean with Natalie. Her mother will acquiesce. And you can tell Natalie that if she would buy something—some dress, or something—for the mother of old Calabressa, who is still living; at Spezia, I think—she would make the old chap glad. And that would be a mark of my gratitude also; you see, I have never had even the chance of thanking him as yet."

Lord Evelyn rose.

"Very well," said he, "I will send you a report of my mission. How am I to find them?"

"You must find them through Calabressa," he said, "for I have not got their address. So you can start this evening?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then I will telegraph at once to Calabressa to let them know you are coming. Mind you, I am very grateful to you, Evelyn; though I wish I was going in your stead."

Lord Evelyn got some further instructions as to how he was to discover Calabressa on his arrival in Naples; and that evening he began his journey to the south. He set out, indeed, with a light heart. He knew that Natalie would be glad to have a message from England.

At Genoa he had to break the journey for a day, having some commission to perform on behalf of the Society: this was a parting bequest from Gathorne Edwards. Then on again; and in due time he entered Naples.

He scarcely noticed as he entered the vehicle and drove away to his hotel what certain bare-

footed lads outside the station were bawling, as they offered the afternoon papers to the newly arrived passengers. What interest had he in Zaccatelli ?

But what the news-vendors were calling aloud was this :

"*The death of the Cardinal Zaccatelli—death of Zaccatelli—the death of the Cardinal Zaccatelli!*"

CHAPTER XVII.

FAREWELL!

"NATALUSHKA," said the tender and anxious mother, laying her hand on the girl's head, "you must bestir yourself. If you let grief eat into your heart like that, you will become ill; and what shall we do then, in a strange hotel? You must bestir yourself; and put away those sad thoughts of yours. I can only tell you again and again that it was none of your doing. It was the act of the Council; how could you help it? And how can you help it now? My old friend Stefan says it is beyond recall. Come, Natalushka, you must not blame yourself; it is the Council, not you, who have done this; and no doubt they think they acted justly."

Natalie did not answer. She sighed slightly. Her eyes were turned towards the blue waters beyond the Castello dell' Ovo.

"Child," the mother continued, "we must leave Naples——"

"Leave Naples!" the girl cried, with a sudden look of alarm. "Having done nothing—having tried nothing?" Then she added, in a lower voice, "Well, yes, mother, I suppose it is true what they say, that one can do nothing by remaining. Perhaps—perhaps we ought to go. And yet it is terrible——"

She shivered slightly as she spoke.

"You see, Natalushka," her mother said, determined to distract her attention somehow, "this is an expensive hotel; we must be thinking of what money we have left to take us back. We have been here some time; and it is a costly journey, all the way to England."

"Oh, but not to England—not to England, mother!" Natalie exclaimed, quickly.

"Why not to England, then?"

"Anywhere else, mother," the daughter pleaded. "If you wish it, we will go away; no doubt General von Zoesch knows best; there is no hope. We will go away from Naples, mother; and—and you know I shall not be much of a tax on you. We will live very cheaply

somewhere; and perhaps I could help a little by teaching music, as Madame Potecki does. Whenever you wish it, I am ready to go."

"But why not to England, Natalushka?"

"I cannot tell you, mother."

She rose quickly; and passed into her own room; and shut the door.

There she stood for a second or two, irresolute and breathless, like one who had just escaped into a place of refuge. Then her eye fell on her writing-desk, which was on a side-table, and open. Slowly, and with a strange, pained expression about her mouth, she went and sat down, and took out some writing materials, and absently and mechanically arranged them before her. Her eyes were tearless, but once or twice she sighed deeply. After a time she began to write, with an unsteady hand.

"My dearest,

"You must let me send you a few lines of farewell; for it would be hard if, in saying good-bye, one were not permitted to say a kind word or two that could be remembered afterwards. And your heart will have already told

you why it is not for you and me now to look forward to the happiness that once seemed to lie before us. You know what a terrible result has followed from my rashness; but then you are free—that is something; for the rest, perhaps it is less misery to die, than to live and know that you have caused another's death. You remember the night they played *Fidelio;* I told you I should always try to remain worthy of your love; and how could I keep that promise if I permitted myself to think of enjoying a happiness that was made possible at the cost of my father's life? You could not marry a woman so unnatural, so horrible; a marriage purchased at such a price would be foredoomed; there would be a guilty consciousness, a life-long remorse. But why do I speak? Your heart tells you the same thing. There only remains for us to say good-bye; and to thank God for the gleam of happiness that shone on us for a little time.

"And you, my dearest of friends, you will send me also a little message, that I can treasure as a remembrance of bygone days. And you must tell me also whether what has occurred has deterred you from going further, or whether you

still remain hoping for better things in the world, and resolved to do what you can to bring them about. That would be a great consolation to me, to know that your life still had a noble object. Then the world would not be quite blank, either for you or for me; you with your work, I with this poor, kind mother of mine, who needs all the affection I can give her. Then I hope to hear of you from time to time. But my mother and myself do not return to England.

"And now what am I to say, being so far away from you, that will sound pleasant to you, and that you will remember after with kindness? I look back now over the time since I have known you; and it appears a beautiful dream—anxious sometimes, and troubled, but always with a golden future before it that almost bewildered the eyes. And what am I to say of your goodness, so unvarying and constant; and your thoughtfulness; and your great unselfishness, and outspokenness? When was there the least misunderstanding between us? I could read your heart like my own. Only once, you remember, was there a chance of a shadow coming between us—through my own folly; and yet perhaps it was only natural

for a girl, fancying that everything was going to be smooth and happy in her life, to look back on what she had said in times of trouble, and to be afraid of having spoken with too little reserve. But then you refused to have even the slightest lovers' quarrel; you laughed away my folly: do you wonder if I was more than ever glad that I had given my life into your wise and generous guidance? And it is not now, when I am speaking to you for the last time, that I can regret having let you know what my feelings were towards you. Oh, my darling, you must not imagine, because these words that I am writing are cold and formal, that my heart beats any the less quickly when I think of you and the days we were together. I said to you that I loved you; I say to you now that I love you, with my whole heart; and I have no feeling of shame. If you were here, I would look into your face, and repeat it—I think without a blush; I would kiss you; I would tell you that I honour you; that I had looked forward to giving you all the trust and affection and devotion of a wife. That is because I have faith in you; my soul is open and clear to you; read, and if you can find there

anything but admiration for your nobleness of heart, and earnest hopes for your happiness, and gratitude to you for all your kindness, then, and not otherwise, shall I have cause for shame.

"Now I have to send you my last word of good-bye——"

She had borne up so far; but now she put the pen aside, and bent her head down on to her hands, and her frame was shaken with her sobbing. When she resumed, she could scarcely see for the bitter tears that kept welling to her eyes.

"—— and you will think, looking at these cold words on the paper, that it was easy for me to do so. It has not been so easy. I pray God to bless you; and to keep you brave and true and unselfish; and give you happiness in the success of your work. And I ask a line from you in reply —not sad, but something that I may look at from time to time, and that will make me believe you have plenty of interests and hopes in the world, and that you do not altogether regret that you and I met, and were friends, for a time.

"NATALIE."

This was a strange thing: she took another

sheet of paper, and slowly and with a trembling hand wrote on it these words—"*Your Wife.*" That was all; no doubt it was the signature she had hoped one day to use. She regarded it long, and earnestly, and sadly; until, indeed, she could not see it for the tears that rose afresh into her eyes. Then she tore up the piece of paper hastily; folded her letter and addressed it, without sealing the envelope; and carried it into the other room.

"Read it, mother," she said; and she turned to the window to conceal her tear-stained face.

The mother opened the letter, and glanced at it.

"You forget, child," she said, "I know so little English. Tell me what it is you have written."

So she was forced to turn. And apparently, as she spoke, she was quite calm; but there was a darkness underneath her eyes; and there was in her look something of the worn, sad expression of her mother's face. Briefly and simply she repeated the substance of the letter, giving no reasons, or justifications. She seemed to take it for granted that her decision was unavoidable, and would be seen to be so by every one.

"Natalushka," the mother said, looking anxiously at the troubled face, "do you know what you are about to do? It is an act of expiation—for something you have not committed."

"Could I do otherwise?" she said. "You, mother: would you have me think of a marriage procured through my father's death? It is too horrible."

The mother went to her, and took her two hands.

"My poor child, are you to have no happier life than I have had, after all? When I used to see you, I used to say to myself, 'Ah! my little Natalushka will never know what has befallen me. She will have a happy life.' I could see you laughing as you walked in the gardens there. You looked so pleased, so content, so bright and cheerful. And now you also are to have a life of disappointment and sad memories——"

"Oh, you must not talk like that, mother," the girl said, hastily, in a low voice. "Have I not you with me? We shall always be together, shall we not? And you know we shall not have time for brooding over what is past; we shall have much to do; we must make a pleasant small home

somewhere. Oh, there are many, many people far worse off in the world than we are. So you must think of getting away from Naples, mother; and think of where you would like to live; and where I should be most likely to be able to earn a little. The years will teach us to forget—and—and—— And now you know why I do not wish to go back to England."

Her eyes were cast down; but she was forcing herself to speak quite cheerfully.

"You see, mother, my knowing English is a great advantage. If we were to go to one of the towns on the Riviera, like Nice, or Mentone, where so many English families are, one might get pupils who would want to learn English songs as well as Italian and German——"

"Yes, yes, Natalushka; but I am not going to have you slave for me. The little allowance that my cousins send me will do very well for us two, though you will not get so fine dresses. Then, you see, Natalushka, Mentone or Nice would be a dear place to live in."

"Very well, mother," said the girl, with the same apparent cheerfulness, "I will go down and post my letter, and at the same time get the loan

of a guide-book. Then we shall study the maps and pick out a nice, quiet, remote little place, where we can live—and forget."

The last two words were uttered to herself, as she opened the door, and went out. She sighed a little as she went down the staircase—that was all; she was thinking of things very far away. She passed into the hall; and went to the bureau for some postage-stamps. As she stood there, some one, unperceived, came up to her. It was Calabressa.

"Little daughter——" said he, in a trembling voice.

She uttered a slight cry, and shrank back.

"Little daughter——" said he, holding out his hand.

But some strange instinct possessed her. She could not avoid touching his hand—or the tips of his fingers, rather—for one brief second; then she turned away from him with an involuntary shudder; and went back through the hall, her head bent down. Calabressa stood looking after her for a moment or two; then he turned and left the hotel.

He walked quickly; there were tears running

down his face. He looked neither to the right nor to the left; he was talking in a broken voice to himself; he repeated again and again, "No; she shall not turn away from me. She will be sorry for that soon. She will say she should not have crushed the heart of her old friend Calabressa."

He walked out to Posilipo. Near the villa where he had formerly sought the representatives of the Council, he passed an old woman who was selling fruit by the roadside. She glanced up at him, and said—

"The door is closed, signore."

"The door must be opened, good mother," said he, scarcely regarding her as he hurried on.

Arrived in the garden of the villa, his summons brought out to the entrance of the grotto the Secretary Granaglia, who somewhat impatiently told him that it was quite impossible that any member of the Council should see him.

"And no doubt it is about that Lind affair?"

"Indirectly only," Calabressa said. "No, it concerns myself mostly."

"Quite enough time, the Council think, has been given to the Lind affair. I can tell you, my

friend, there are more important matters stirring. Now, farewell; I am wanted within."

However, by dint of much persuasion, Calabressa got Granaglia to take in a message to Von Zoesch. And, sure enough, his anticipations were correct; the good-natured, bluff old soldier made his appearance; and seemed glad to get a breath of fresh air for a minute or two.

"Well, well, Calabressa, what is it now? Are not you all satisfied?—even to that scoundrel of a Cardinal, who cheated us and died peacefully in his bed, after all! Then the young lady has got her sweetheart: is it not enough? You rogue! you guessed pretty rightly; to tell them the news was no light matter; but by-and-by she will become reconciled. Her lover is to be envied; she is a beautiful child, and she has courage. Well, are they not satisfied?"

"I crave your pardon, Excellency, for intruding upon you," Calabressa said, in a sort of constrained voice. "It is my own affair that brings me here. I shall not waste your time. Your Excellency, I claim to be substitute for Ferdinand Lind."

The tall soldier burst out laughing.

"What the devil is the matter with you, Calabressa: have you gone mad?"

For a second Calabressa stood silent; his eyes downcast; his fingers working nervously with the cap he held in his hands.

"Your Excellency," he said, as if struggling to repress some emotion, "it is a simple matter. I have been to see the beautiful child you speak of; I addressed her, in the hall of the hotel; she turned away from me, shuddering, as if I were a murderer—from me, who love her more than I love my life. Oh, your Excellency, do not smile at it; it is not a girlish câprice; she has a noble heart; it is not a little thing that would make her cruel. I know what she thinks—that I have been the means of procuring her father's death. Be it so. I will give her father his life again. Take mine—what do I care?"

"Nonsense, nonsense, my Calabressa. The girl has bewitched you. One must talk to her. Take your life in exchange for that of Lind? Pooh! We cannot send good men after bad; you are too valuable to us; whereas he, if he were released, could be of no more use at all. It is a generous notion on your part, friend Calabressa; but it is Quixotic. Moreover, impossible."

"You forget, Excellency, that I can claim it," said Calabressa, firmly. "Under Article Five I can claim to be the substitute of Ferdinand Lind. Your Excellency yourself has not the power to refuse me. I call upon you to release Lind from the death-penalty; to-morrow I will take his place; then you can send a message to—to Natalie Berezolyi's daughter, that, if I have wronged her, I have made amends."

Von Zoesch grew more serious; he eyed Calabressa curiously. The elder man stood there trembling a little with nervous excitement; but with a firm look on his face: there was no doubt about his resolve.

"Friend Calabressa," said Von Zoesch, in a kindly way, "it seems as if you had transferred your old love for Natalie Berezolyi to Natalie's daughter, only with double intensity. But, you see, we must not allow you to sacrifice yourself merely because a girl turns her heel on you. It is not to be thought of. We cannot afford to lose you; besides, it is monstrous that the innocent should suffer, and the guilty go free——"

"The articles of the Society, your Excellency——"

"That particular article, my Calabressa, was framed with a view to encourage self-sacrifice and generosity, no doubt; but not with a view, surely, to any such extreme madness as this. No. The fact is, I had no time to explain the circumstances of the case to the young lady, or I could easily have shown her how you were no more involved than herself in procuring the decree against her father. To-day I cannot; to-morrow I cannot; the day after to-morrow, I solemnly assure you, I will see her, and reason with her, and convince her that you have acted throughout as her best friend only could have done. You are too sensitive, my Calabressa: ah, is it not the old romance recalled that is making you so? But this I promise you, that she shall beg your pardon for having turned away from you."

"Then," said Calabressa, with a little touch of indignant pride, "then your Excellency imagines that it is my vanity that has been wounded?"

"No. It is your heart. And she will be sorry for having pained a true friend; is not that as it should be? Why, your proposal; if she agreed to it, what would be the result? You would stab her with remorse. For this momentary slight you

would say, 'See, I have killed myself. Learn now that Calabressa loved you.' But that would be very like revenge, my Calabressa; and you ought not to think of taking revenge on the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi."

"Your Excellency——" Calabressa was about to protest; but he was stopped.

"Leave it to me, my friend. The day after to-morrow we shall have more leisure. Meanwhile, no more thoughts of Quixotism. *Addio!*"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SACRIFICE.

It would be difficult to say whether Calabressa was altogether sincere in claiming to become the substitute for Ferdinand Lind; or whether he was not practising a little self-deception, and pacifying his wounded pride and affection by this outburst of generosity, while secretly conscious that his offer would not be accepted. However, what Calabressa had declared himself ready to do, in a fit of wild sentimentalism, another had already done, in terrible earnest. A useless life had suddenly become ennobled by a tragic and self-sacrificing death.

Two days after Lord Evelyn had left for Naples, Brand and Gathorne Edwards were as usual in the chambers in Lisle Street; and, the business of the morning being mostly over, they were chatting together. There was a brighter

look on George Brand's face than had been there for many a day.

"What an indefatigable fellow that Molyneux is!" Edwards was saying.

"It is a good thing some one can do something," Brand answered. "As for me, I can't settle down to anything. I feel as if I had been living on laughing-gas these last two days. I feel as if I had come alive again into another world, and was a little bit bewildered just as yet. However, I suppose we shall get shaken into our new positions by-and-by; and the sooner they let us know their final arrangements the better."

"As for me," said Edwards, carelessly, "now that I have left the Museum I don't care where I may have to go."

At this moment a note was brought in by the old German, and handed to Edwards. He glanced at the straggling, almost illegible, address in pencil on the dirty envelope.

"Well, this is too bad," he said, impatiently.

"What is it?"

"That fellow Kirski. He is off again, I can see by his writing. He never was very good at it; but this is the handwriting of delirium tremens."

He opened the letter; and glanced at the first page.

"Oh yes," he said, in disgust, "he's off again, clearly."

"What does he say?"

"The usual rigmarole—only not quite so legible—the beautiful angel who was kind to him—he has taken her portrait from its hiding-place—it is sacred now—no more public-house—well, it looks rather as if he had been to several——"

At this point, however, Edwards's pale, high forehead flushed a little.

"I wish I had not told him, but he speaks of Miss Lind being in trouble—and he says God never meant one so beautiful and kind as she to be in trouble—and if her father——"

His face grew grave.

"What is this?"

He turned the leaf suddenly; and glanced at the remainder of the letter.

"Good God, what does the man mean? What has he done?" he exclaimed.

His face was quite pale. The letter dropped from his hands. Then he jumped to his feet.

"Come, Brand—quick—quick!" he said, hurriedly. "You must come with me——"

"But what is the matter?" Brand said, following him in amazement.

"I don't know," said Edwards, almost incoherently. "He may be raving—it may only be drunkenness—but he says he is about to kill himself in place of Lind—the young lady shall not be troubled—she was kind to him, and he is grateful—I am to send her a message——"

By this time the two friends were hurrying to the dingy little thoroughfare in which Kirski had his lodgings.

"Don't alarm yourself, Edwards," said Brand; "he has broken out again, that is all."

"I am not so sure. He was at his work yesterday, and sober enough."

"His brain may have given way, then; it was never very strong. But these continual ravings about murder or suicide are dangerous; they will develop into homicidal mania, most likely; and if he cannot get at his enemy Michaieloff he may do a mischief to somebody else."

"I hope he has not done a mischief to himself already," said Edwards, who had had more opportunities than his companion of studying the workings of Kirski's disordered brain.

They reached the house, and knocked at the door. The landlady made her appearance.

"Is Kirski in the house?" Edwards asked eagerly.

"No, he ain't," she said, with but scant courtesy.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, in great relief. "You are sure? He went out to his work as usual?"

"How should I know?" said the woman, who was evidently not on good terms with her lodger.

"He had his breakfast as usual?"

"His breakfast!" she said, scornfully. "No, he hadn't. He may pick up his breakfast about the streets, like a cat; but he don't have any 'ere. And a cat he is, sneaking up and down the stairs; how do I know whether he is in the house or whether he ain't?"

At this Edwards turned pale again with a sudden fear. Brand interposed.

"You don't know? Then show us his room; we will see for ourselves."

He passed the woman, leaving her to shut the door, and went into the small dark passage, waiting for her at the foot of the stairs. Grum-

bling to herself she came along to show them the way. It did not pay her to waste her time like this, she said, for a lodger who took no food in the house, and spent his earnings in the gin-shop. She should not be surprised if they were to find him asleep at that time of the day. He had ways like a cat.

The landing they reached was as dark as the staircase; so that when she turned a handle and flung a door open there was a sudden glare of light. At the same moment she uttered a shrill scream, and retreated backward. She had caught a glimpse of some horrible thing—she hardly knew what. It was the body of the man Kirski lying prone on the uncarpeted floor, his hands clenched. There was a dark pool of blood beside him.

Edwards sank shuddering into a chair, sick and faint. He could neither move nor speak; he dared hardly look at the object lying there in the wan light. But Brand went quickly forward; and took hold of one of these clenched hands. It was quite cold. He tried to turn over the body; but relinquished that effort. The cause of death was obvious enough. Kirski had stabbed him-

self with one of the tools used in his trade; either he had deliberately lain down on the floor to make sure of driving the weapon home, or he had accidentally fallen so after dealing himself the fatal blow. Apparently he had been dead for some hours.

Brand rose. The landlady at the door was alternately screaming and sobbing; declaring that she was ruined; that not another lodger would come to her house.

"Be quiet, woman; and send to the police-station, at once," Brand said. "Wait a moment: when did you last see this man?"

"This morning, sir—early this morning, sir," said she, in a profusion of tears over her prospective loss. "He came downstairs with a letter in his hand; and there was twopence for my little boy to take it when he came home from school. How should I know he had gone back, sir, to make away with himself like that, and ruin a poor widow woman, sir——"

"Have you a servant in the house?"

"No, sir; no one but myself—and me dependent——"

"Then go at once to the police-station, and tell

the inspector on duty what has happened. You can do that; can't you? You will do no good by standing crying there, or getting the neighbours in. I will stop here till you come back."

She went away, leaving Brand and his paralyzed companion with this ghastly object lying prone on the floor.

"Poor devil!" Brand said; "his troubles are at an end now. I wonder whether I should lift him on to the bed or wait until they come."

Then another thought struck him; and he turned quickly to his companion, who sat there, horrified and helpless.

"Edwards," said he, "you must pull yourself together. The police will ask you what you know about this affair. Then you will have to give evidence before the coroner's inquest. There is nothing material for you to conceal; but still, no mention must be made of Lisle Street, do you understand?"

Edwards nodded. His face was still of a ghastly white. Then he rose and said—

"Let us go somewhere else, Brand."

His companion took him downstairs into the landlady's parlour; and got him a glass of water.

Apparently there was not a human being in the house but themselves.

"Do you understand, Edwards? Give your private address—not Lisle Street. Then you can tell the story simply enough. That unfortunate fellow come all the way from Russia—virtually a maniac—you can tell them his story if you like. Or shall I?"

"Yes, yes. It has been too much for me, Brand. You see, I had no business to tell him about Lind——"

"The poor wretch would have ended his days miserably anyhow; no doubt, in a madhouse; and probably after killing some quite innocent person. By the way, they will ask you how you came to suspect. Where is that letter?"

Edwards took it from his pocket.

"Tear it up."

He did so; but Brand took the fragments and put them in his own pocket.

"You can tell them he wrote to you; and from the madness of the letter you thought something was wrong. You destroyed the letter. But where is Natalie's portrait?—that must not fall into their hands."

He instantly went upstairs again; leaving his companion alone. There was something strange in his entering this room where the corpse lay: it seemed necessary for him to walk on tiptoe; he uncovered his head. A glance round the almost empty room speedily showed him what he wanted; there was a small wooden casket in a dusky corner by the window; and that, he made no doubt, was the box which the unhappy Kirski had made to contain Natalie's portrait and which he had quite recently dug out from its place of concealment. Brand was surprised, however, to find the casket empty. Then he glanced at the fireplace; there was a little black dust there, as of burned cardboard. Then he made sure that Kirski himself had taken steps to prevent the portrait falling into alien hands.

Beside the box, however, lay a piece of paper, written over in pencil. He took it up and made out that it was chiefly ill-spelt Italian: "*Whatever punishment may be decreed against any Officer, Companion, or Friend of the Society—may be vicariously borne by any other Officer, Companion, or Friend—who, of his own full and free consent, acts as substitute—the original offender becoming*

thereby redeemed, acquitted, and released." Then followed some words which he could not make out at all.

He carried the paper downstairs.

"He appears to have burned the photograph, Edwards. But he has left this—see."

Edwards glanced at the trembling scrawl, with a slight shiver; the handwriting was the same as that he had received half an hour before.

"It is only Article V.," he said. "The poor fellow used to keep repeating that, after Calabressa and I taught him in Venice."

"But what is written below?"

Edwards forced himself to take the paper in his hands, and to scan more carefully its contents.

"It is Russian," he said, "but so badly written. '*My life is not endurable longer—but I shall die happy in being of service to the beautiful angel who was kind to me—tell her she need not be in trouble any more.—I forgive Pavel Michaieloff, as my masters desire. I do not wish my wife or my neighbours to know what I have done.*'"

"This we have no right to meddle with," Brand said, thoughtfully. "I will put it back

where I got it. But, you see, Edwards, you will have to admit that you were aware this poor wretch was in communication with some secret society or other. Further than that you need say nothing. The cause of his suicide is clear enough. The man was mad when he came to England with that wild craving for revenge in his brain."

Brand carried the paper upstairs again, and placed it where he had found it. At the same moment there was a sound of footsteps below; and presently the police-officers, accompanied by the landlady and by Gathorne Edwards, who had somewhat recovered his composure, entered to hold their preliminary investigation. The notes that the inspector took down in his pocket-book were brief enough, and were mostly answers to questions addressed to Brand, regarding what he knew of the deceased man's circumstances. Edwards translated for the inspector the writing on the paper found lying there; and said he believed Kirski had some connection with a secret society; but that it was obvious he had destroyed himself from despair; and that, indeed, the unhappy man had never been properly right in his

mind since ever he had known him, though they had hoped, by getting him to do steady work and sure wages, to wean him away from brooding over the wrongs that had driven him from his native country. Edwards gave the officer his address, Brand saying that he had to leave England that same night and would not be available for any further enquiry, but that his friend knew precisely as much about the case as himself. Then he and his companion left.

Edwards breathed more freely when he got out of the house, even into the murky atmosphere of Soho.

"It is a tragic end," he said, "but perhaps it is the best that could have befallen him. I called yesterday at the shop; and found he was there, and sober, though I did not see him. I was surprised to find he had gone back."

"I thought he had solemnly promised you not to drink any more," Brand said.

"He had made the same promises before. He took to drink merely to forget; to drown this thing that was working in his brain. If he had lived, it would have been the old story over again. He would have buried the portrait in

St. James's Park, as he did before; gone back to the gin-shop; and in course of time drank himself to death. This end is terrible enough; but there is a touch of something fine about it; it redeems much. What a worship the poor fellow had for Miss Lind, to be sure; because she was kind to him when he was half mad with his wrongs. I remember he used to go about the churches in Venice, to see if any of the saints in the pictures were like her; but none satisfied him. You will send her a message of what he has done to repay her at last?"

"I will take it myself," said Brand, hastily. "I must go, Edwards. You must get —— or —— to come to these chambers; any one you may think of. I must go myself, and at once."

"To-night, then?"

"Yes, to-night. It is a pity I troubled Evelyn to go."

"He would stay a day, perhaps two days, in Genoa. It is just possible you might overtake him by going straight through."

"Yes," said Brand, with a strange smile on his face—as if he were looking at something far away—and it was scarcely to his companion that

he spoke—"I think I will go straight through. I should not like any one but myself to take Natalie this news."

They walked back to the chambers; and Brand began to put things in order for his going.

"It is rather a shame," he said, during this business; "for one to be glad that this poor wretch has come to such an end. But what better could have happened to him, as you say? You will see about a decent funeral, Edwards; and I will leave you something to stop the mouth of that cater-wauling landlady. You can tell them at the inquest that he has no relations in this country."

By-and-by he said—

"If there are any debts, I will pay them. And if no one has any objection I should like to have that casket, to show to—to Miss Lind. Did you see the carving on it?"

"I looked at it."

"He must have spent many a night working at that. Poor wretch, I wish I had looked after him more; and done more for him. One always feels that when people are dead and it is too late."

"I don't see how you could have done more

for him," Edwards said, honestly enough; though indeed it was he himself who had been Kirski's chief protector of late.

Before evening came Brand had put affairs in proper trim for his departure; and he left London with a lighter heart than had been his for a long time. But ever and anon, as he journeyed to the South, with a wonderful picture of joy and happiness before him, his mind would wander away back to the little room in Soho, and he could see the unhappy Russian lying dead, with the message left behind for the beautiful angel who had been kind to him. And he could not but think that Kirski would have died happier if he had known that Natalie herself would come some day, and put flowers, tenderly and perhaps even with tears, on his grave. Who that knew her could doubt but that that would be her first act on returning to England? At least, Brand thought so.

CHAPTER XIX.

NATALIE SPEAKS.

It was about five in the morning, and as yet dark, when George Brand arrived in Naples. He wrote a note asking Calabressa to call on him, and left it to be despatched by the porter of the hotel; then he lay down for an hour or two, without undressing, for he was somewhat fatigued with his continuous travelling.

On going down to breakfast he got Calabressa's answer, saying he was very sorry he could not obey the commands of his dear friend Monsieur Brand, because he was on duty; but that he could be found if Monsieur Brand would have the goodness to seek out the wine-vaults of one Tommaso in the Vicolo Isotta. There, also, Monsieur Brand would see some others.

Accordingly, after breakfast, Brand set out, leisurely and observantly, for he did not think

there was any great hurry. It was a beautiful brisk, breezy morning; though occasionally a squall of rain swept across the roughened sea, blotting out Capri altogether. There were crisp gleams of white on the far plain; and there was a dazzling mist of sunlight and sea-foam where the waves sprung high on the rocks of the citadel; and even here in the busy streets there was a fresh sea-odour as the gusts of the damp wind blew along. Naples was alive and busy: but Brand regarded this swarming population with but little interest. He knew that none of his friends would be out and abroad so early.

In due time he found out the gloomy little court and the wine-vaults. Moreover, he had no trouble with the ghoul-like Tommaso, who had apparently received his instructions. No sooner had Brand enquired for Calabressa, than he was invited to follow his guide, who waddled along, candle in hand, like some overgrown orang-outang. At length they reached the staircase, where there was a little more light; and here he found Calabressa waiting to receive him. Calabressa seemed overjoyed.

"Yes, yes, my dear Monsieur Brand, you have

arrived opportunely. You also will remonstrate with that beautiful child for having fallen out with her old friend Calabressa. Think of it!—one who would wear his knees out to serve her; and when I go to the hotel——"

"One word, Calabressa," said Brand, as he followed him into a small, empty room. "Tell me, is Lind in Naples?"

"Assuredly. He has petitioned for a year's grace—he wishes to join the Montenegrins."

"He will have more than a year's grace," said Brand, gravely. "Something has happened. You remember the man Kirski? Well, he has killed himself to release Lind."

"Just Heaven!" Calabressa exclaimed; but the exclamation was one of astonishment, not in the least of regret. On the contrary, he began to speak in tones of exultation.

"Ah, let us hear now what the beautiful child will say! For who was it who reclaimed that savage animal; and taught him the beautifulness of self-sacrifice; and showed him how the most useless life could be made serviceable and noble? Who but I? He was my pupil; I first watched the light of virtue beginning to radiate through

his savage nature. That is what I will ask the beautiful Natalushka when I see her; perhaps she will not again turn away from an old friend——"

"You seem to forget, Calabressa, that your teaching has brought this man to his death," Brand said.

"Why not?" said Calabressa, with a perfectly honest stare. "Why not? Was it not well done? Was it not a fitting end? Why, I, even I, who watched him long, did not expect to see that: his savagery falling away from him bit by bit; himself rising to this grand height—that he should give his life to save another: I tell you, it is a beautiful thing; he has understood what I taught him; he has seen clear."

Calabressa was much excited; and very proud. It seemed to him that he had saved a soul—as he remarked in his ornate French.

"Perhaps it has all happened for the best," Brand said; "perhaps it was the best that could have befallen that poor devil too. But you are mistaken, Calabressa, about his reasons for giving up his life like that. It was not for the sake of a theory at all—admirable as your teachings may have been. It was for the sake of Natalie

Lind. He heard she was in trouble; and he learned the cause of it. It was gratitude to her —it was love for her—that made him do this."

Calabressa changed his ground in an instant.

"Assuredly—assuredly, my dear friend: do you think I fail to understand that—I, who perceived that he worshipped that beautiful child as if she were a saint, and more than all the saints? Do you think I cannot mark that—the sentiment of love, the fervour of worship, growing brighter and purer day by day until it bursts into the beautiful flame of self-sacrifice? My faith, this must be told at once. Remain here a few moments, my dear Mr. Brand. This is news indeed."

"Wait a bit, Calabressa. I came to you to get the name of Natalie's hotel. And where is Lord Evelyn?"

"One moment—one moment," said the old albino, as he went out and shut the door behind him.

When Calabressa ceased to talk in French, he also ceased to use roundabout literary-sentimental metaphors; and his report delivered in the next room would appear to have been brief

enough; for almost immediately he returned, accompanied by Von Zoesch, to whom Brand was introduced.

"I am honoured in making your acquaintance," the tall soldier said, in a pleasant way. "I have heard much of you; you are a good worker; likewise you do not flinch when a duty is demanded of you. Perhaps if you would only condescend to reinforce the treasury sometimes, the Council would be still further grateful to you. However, we are not to become beggars at a first interview—and that a short one, necessarily; for to-day we start for Genoa."

"I am sorry for that," Brand said, simply. "There were some representations I wished to lay before the Council—some very serious representations."

"Perhaps some other time, then. In the mean while, our hands are full. And that reminds me that the news you bring makes one of my tasks to-day a pleasant one. Yes, I remember something of that maniac-fellow babbling about a saint and an angel—I heard of it. So it was your beautiful Miss Lind who was the saint and the angel? Well, do you know that I was about

to give that young lady a very good scolding to-day?"

Brand flushed quickly. The authority of the Council had no terrors for him where Natalie was concerned.

"I beg to remind you," he said, respectfully but firmly, "that the fact of Miss Lind's father being connected with the Society gives no one the right to intermeddle in her private affairs—— "

"Oh, but, my dear sir," said Von Zoesch, laughing, "I have ample right. Her mother Natalie and I are very old friends indeed. You have not seen the charming young lady, then, since your arrival?"

"No."

"Excellent—excellent. You shall come and hear the scolding I have to give her. Oh, I assure you it will not harm her much. Calabressa will bring you along to the Villa Odelschalchi, eleven sharp. We must not keep a lady—two ladies, indeed—waiting, after making an appointment."

He rose from the plain wooden chair on which he had been sitting; and his visitor had to rise also. But Brand stood reluctant to go; and his brows were drawn down.

"I beg your pardon," said he, "but if you are so busy, why not depute some friend of the young lady to carry her a message? A girl is easily frightened."

"No, no, my dear sir; having made an appointment, must we not keep it? Come, I shall expect you to make one of the party; it will be a pleasant little comedy before we go to more serious matters. *Au revoir!*" He bowed slightly, and withdrew.

Some little time afterwards Brand, Evelyn, and Calabressa were driving along the rough streets in an open carriage. The presence of Lord Evelyn had been a last concession obtained from General von Zoesch by Calabressa.

"Why not?" Von Zoesch had said, good-naturedly, "he is one of us. Besides, there is nothing of importance at Portici. It is a little family party; it is a little comedy before we go to Genoa."

As they rattled along, Lord Evelyn was very talkative and joyous. He had seen Natalie the evening before; within an hour after his arrival. He was laughing at Brand for fearing she might have been induced to go to some wretched inn.

"I myself; did I not say to you it was a beautiful hotel?" said Calabressa, with a hurt air. "The most beautiful view in Naples!"

"I think, after what she will hear to-day," said Evelyn, "she ought to ask us to dine there. That would be an English way of finishing up all her trials and troubles." But he turned to Calabressa with a graver look. "What about Lind? Will they reinstate him now? Will they send him back to England?"

"Reinstate him in office?" said Calabressa, with a scornful smile. "My faith, no! Neither him nor Beratinsky. They will give them letters to Montenegro: isn't it enough?"

"Well, I think so. And Reitzei?"

"Reitzei has been stationed at Brindisi; one of our moral police; and lucky for him also."

When they arrived at the Villa Odelschalchi they were shown into a little ante-room where they found Granaglia; and he was introduced to the two strangers.

"Who have come?" Calabressa said, in a low voice.

The little sallow-faced Secretary smiled.

"Several Brothers of the Council," he said.

"They wish to see this young lady, who has turned so many heads. You, for example, my Calabressa, are mad with regard to her. Well, they pay her a compliment. It is the first time any woman has been in the presence of the Council."

At this moment Von Zoesch came in, and hastily threw aside his travelling-cloak.

"Come, my friends," said he; and he took them with him; leaving Granaglia to receive the ladies when they should arrive.

The lofty and spacious apartment they now entered, on the other side of the corridor, was apparently one of a suite of rooms, facing the sea. Its walls were decorated in Pompeian fashion, with simulated trellis-work, and plenty of birds, beasts, and fishes about; but the massive curtains and spreading chandeliers were all covered over as if the house had not been inhabited for some time. All that was displayed of the furniture of the chamber were some chairs of blue satin, with white and gold backs and legs; and these looked strange enough, seeing that they were placed irregularly round an oblong, rough deal table, which looked as if it had just come from the workshop of some neighbouring carpenter.

At or near this table several men, nearly all elderly, were sitting, talking carelessly to each other; one of them, indeed, at the furthermost corner, was a venerable patriarch, who wore a large soft wideawake over his snow-white hair. At the head of the table sat the handsome, pale-faced, Greek-looking man, who has been mentioned as one Conventz. He was writing a letter; but stopped when Brand and Evelyn were introduced to him. Then Calabressa drew in some more of the gilt and blue chairs, and they sat down close by.

Brand kept anxiously looking towards the door. He had not long to wait. When it opened, Granaglia appeared, conducting into the room two figures dressed in black. These dark figures looked impressive in the great, white, empty room.

For a second Natalie stood bewildered and irresolute, seeing all these faces turned to her; and when her eyes fell on her lover, she turned deadly pale. But she went forward, along with her mother, to the two chairs brought for them by Granaglia; and they sat down. The mother was veiled. Natalie glanced at her lover again;

there was a strange look in his face—but not of pain or fear.

"My dear young lady," said Von Zoesch, in his pleasantest way, "we have nothing but good news to communicate to you, so you must not be alarmed. You are among friends. We are going away to-day; we all wish to say good-bye to you; and wish you a happy journey back to England; that is all. But I will tell you that my first object in asking you to come here was to give you a good rating; when you and I should have been alone together I would have asked you if you had no consideration for old friends, that you should have turned away from my colleague, Calabressa, and wounded him grievously. I would have reminded you that it was not he, but you yourself, who put the machinery in motion which secured your father's righteous conviction."

"I ask you to spare me, signore," the girl said, in a low and trembling voice.

"Oh, I am not now going to scold you, my dear young lady. I intended to have done so. I intended to have shown you that you were wrong, and exceedingly ungrateful; and that you ought to ask pardon of my friend Calabressa.

However, it is all changed. You need not fear him any more; you need not turn away from him. Your father is pardoned; and free."

She looked up, uncertain, as if she had not heard aright.

"I repeat: your father is pardoned; and free. You shall learn how and why afterwards. Meanwhile you have nothing before you, as I take it, but to reap the reward of your bravery."

She did not hear this last sentence. She had turned quickly to her mother.

"Mother, do you hear?" she said, in a whisper.

"Yes, yes, child: thank God!"

"Now, you see, my dear young lady," Von Zoesch continued, "it is not a scolding, but good news I have given to you; and nothing remains but that you should bid us good-bye, and say you are not sorry you appealed to us when you were in trouble, according to the advice of your good friend Calabressa. See, I have brought here with me a gentleman whom you know, and who will see you safe back to Naples, and to England; and another, his companion, who is also, I understand, an old friend of yours; you will have a pleasant party. Your father will be sent to join in a good

cause, where he may retrieve his name if he chooses; you and your friends go back to England. So I may say that all your wishes are gratified at last; and we have nothing now but to say good-bye."

The girl had been glancing timidly and nervously at the figures grouped round the table; and her breast was heaving. She rose; perhaps it was to enable herself to speak more freely; perhaps it was only out of deference to those seated there.

"No," she said, in a low voice, but it was heard clearly enough in the silence. "I—I would say a word to you—whom I may not see again. Yes, I thank you—from my heart; you have taken a great trouble away from my life; I—I thank you. But there is something I would say."

She paused for a second. She was very pale. She seemed to be nerving herself for some effort; and, strangely enough, her mother's hand, unseen, was stretched up to her, and she clasped it and held it tight. It gave her courage.

"It is true, I am only a girl; you are my elders; and you are men; but I have known good and brave men who were not ashamed to listen to what a woman thought was right. And

it is as a woman that I speak to you," she said, and her voice, low and timid as it was, had a strange pathetic vibration in it, that went to the heart. "I have suffered much of late. I hope no other woman will ever suffer in the same way."

Again she hesitated; but for the last time.

"Oh, gentlemen, you who are so powerful, you who profess to seek only mercy and justice and peace, why should you, also, follow the old bad cruel ways, and stain yourselves with blood? Surely it is not for you, the friends of the poor, the champions of the weak, the teachers of the people, to rely on the weapon of the assassin! When you go to the world, and seek for help and labour, surely you should go with clean hands; so that the wives and the sisters and the daughters of those who may join you may not have their lives made terrible to them. It is not a reign of terror you would establish on the earth! For the sake of those who have already joined you—for the sake of the far greater numbers who may yet be your associates—I implore you to abandon these secret and dreadful means. Surely, gentlemen, the blessing of Heaven is more likely to follow you and crown your work if you can say to every

man whom you ask to join you, 'You have women-folk around you. They have tender consciences, perhaps. But we will ask of you nothing that your sister or your wife or your daughter would not approve.' Then good men will not be afraid of you; then brave men will not have to stifle their conscience in serving you; and whether you succeed or do not succeed, you will have walked in clear ways."

Her mother felt that she was trembling; but her voice did not tremble—beyond that pathetic thrill in it which was always there when she was deeply moved.

"I have to beg your pardon, sir," she said, addressing herself more particularly to Von Zoesch, but scarcely daring to lift her eyes. "But—but do not think that when you have made everything smooth for a woman's happiness, she can then think only of herself. She also may think a little about others; and even with those who are nearest and dearest to her, how can she bear to know that perhaps they may be engaged in something dark and hidden, something terrible, not because it involves danger, but because it involves shame? Gentlemen, if you choose, you can do this. I

appeal to you. I implore you. If you do not seek the co-operation of women—well, that is a light matter; you have our sympathy and love and gratitude—at least you can pursue ways and means of which women can approve—ways and means of which no one, man or woman, needs be ashamed. How otherwise are you what you profess to be—the lovers of what is just, and true, and merciful?"

She sat down, still all trembling. She held her mother's hand. There was a murmur of sympathy and admiration.

Brand turned to Von Zoesch, and said in a low voice—

"You hear, sir? These are the representations I had wished to lay before the Council. I have not a word to add."

"We will consider by-and-by," said Von Zoesch, rising. "It is not a great matter. Come to me in Genoa as you pass through."

But the tall old gentleman with the long white hair had already risen and gone round to where the girl sat; and put his hand on her shoulder.

"My noble child, you have spoken well," said he, in a quavering, feeble voice. "Forgive me

that I come so near; my eyes are very weak now; and you—you do not recognize me any more?"

"Anton!" said the mother.

"Child," said he, still addressing Natalie, "it is old Anton Pepczinski who is speaking to you. But you are disturbed; and I have greatly changed, no doubt. No matter. I have travelled a long way to bring you my blessing; and I give it to you now: I shall not see you again in this world. You were always brave and good; be that to the end: God has given you a noble soul."

She looked up; and something in her face told him that she had recognized him, despite the changes time had made.

"Yes, yes," he said, in great delight. "You remember now that you used to bring me tobacco for my pipe; and ask if I would fight for your country? I can see it in your eyes, my child: you remember, then, the old Anton Pepczinski who used to bring you sweet things? Now come and take me to the English gentleman; I wish to speak to him. Tell me, does he love you—does he understand you?"

She was silent, and embarrassed.

"No? you will not speak?" the old man said, laughing; "you cast your eyes down again? See, now, how one changes! For in former days you made love openly enough—oh yes!—to me, to me myself—oh, my dear, I can remember. I can remember very well. I am not so old that I cannot remember."

Brand rose when he saw them coming. She regarded him earnestly, for a brief second or two; and said something to him, in English, in an undertone—not understood by those standing round.

CHAPTER XX.

NEW SHORES.

THE moonlight lay on the moving Atlantic; and filled the hollow world with a radiance soft and grey and vague. But it struck sharp and white on the polished rails and spars of this great steamer; and shone on the long and shapely decks; and on the broad track of foam that went away back and back and back until it was lost in the horizon. It was late; and nearly all the passengers had gone below. In the silence there was only heard the monotonous sound of the engines, and the continuous rush and seething of the waters as the huge vessel clove its way onward.

Out there by the rail, in the white light, Natalie Lind lay back in her chair, all wrapped up in furs; and her lover was by her side, on a rug on the deck, his hand placed over her hand.

"To-morrow, then, Natalie," he was saying, "you will get your first glimpse of America."

"So you see I have procured your banishment after all," she said, with a smile.

"Not you," was the answer. "I had thought of it often. For a new life, a new world; and it is a new life you and I are beginning together."

Here the bell in the steering-room struck the half-hour; it was repeated by the look-out forward; the sound was strange in the silence.

"Do you know," he said, after a while, "after we have done a fair share of work, we might think ourselves entitled to rest; and what better could we do than go back to England for a time and go down to the old place in Buckinghamshire? Then Mrs. Alleyne would be satisfied at last. How proud the old dame was when she recognized you from your portrait; she thought all her dreams had come true; and that there was nothing left but to go down to the Chequers and carry off that old cabinet as a wedding-present.

"Natalie," he said, presently, "how is it that you always manage to do the right thing at the right time? When Mrs. Alleyne took your mother and you in to the Chequers; and old Mrs.

Diggles led you into her parlour; and dusted the table with her apron, what made you think of asking her for a piece of cake and a cup of tea?"

"My dearest, I saw the cake in the bar!" she exclaimed.

"I believe the old woman was ready to faint with delight when you praised her currant wine, and asked how she made it. You have a wonderful way of getting round people—whether by fair means or otherwise I don't know. Do you think if it had been anybody else but you who went to Von Zoesch in Genoa, he would have let Calabressa come with us to America?"

"Poor old Calabressa," she said, laughing, "he is very brave now about the sea. But he was terribly frightened that bad night we had after leaving Queenstown."

Here some one appeared in the dusky recess at the top of the companion-stairs, and stepped out into the open.

"Are you people never coming below at all?" he said. "I have to inform you, Miss Natalie, with your mamma's compliments, that she can't get on with her English verbs because of that fat girl playing Strauss; and that she is going to her cabin; and wants to know when you are coming."

"Now, at once," said Natalie, getting up out of her chair. "But wait a moment, Evelyn: I cannot go without bidding good night to Calabressa. Where is Calabressa?"

"Calabressa? Oh, in the smoking-room, betting like mad, and going in for all the mock-auctions. I expect some of them will sit up all night to get their first sight of the land. The pilot expects that will be shortly after daybreak."

"You will be up in time for that, Natalie, won't you?" Brand asked.

"Oh yes. Good night, Evelyn!" and she gave him her hand.

Brand went with her down the companion-stairs, carrying her rugs and shawls. In the corridor she turned to bid him good night also.

"Dearest," she said, in a low voice, "do you know what I have been trying all day—to get you to say one word, the smallest word, of regret?"

"But if I have no regret whatever, how can I express any?"

"Sure?"

He laughed, and kissed her.

"Good night, my darling!"

"Good night; God bless you!"

Then he made his way along the gloomy corridor again; and up the broad zinc steps; and out into the moonlight. Evelyn was there; leaning with his arms on the hand-rail; and idly watching, far below, the gleams of light on the grey-black waves.

"It is too fine a night to go below," he said. "What do you say, Brand: shall we wait up for the daylight and the first glimpse of America?"

"If you like," said Brand, taking out his cigar-case, and hauling along the chair in which Natalie had been sitting.

They had the whole of this upper deck to themselves, except when one or other of the officers passed on his rounds; they could talk without risk of being overheard; and they had plenty to talk about—of all that had happened of late, of all that might happen to them in this new country they were nearing.

"Well," he said, "Evelyn, that settlement in Genoa clinched everything, as far as I am concerned. I have no longer any doubt, any hesitation; there is nothing to be concealed now; nothing to be withheld, even from those who are

content to remain merely as our friends. One might have gone on as before; for, after all, these death-penalties only attached to the officers; and the great mass of the members, not being touched by them, need have known nothing about them. But it is better now."

"It was Natalie's appeal that settled that," Lord Evelyn said, as he still watched the shining waves.

"The influence of that girl is extraordinary. One could imagine that some magnetism radiated from her. Or perhaps it is her voice; and her clear faith; and her enthusiasm: when she said something to old Anton Pepczinski, on bidding him good-bye—not about herself, or about him—but about what some of us were hoping for, he was crying like a child. In other times, she might have done great things. She might have led armies."

By-and-by he said—

"As for those decrees, what use were they? From all I could learn, only ten have been issued since the Society was in existence; and eight of those were for the punishment of officers, who ought merely to have been expelled. Of course,

you will get people like Calabressa, with a touch of theatrical-mindedness, who have a love for the terrorism such a thing can produce. But what use is it? It is not by striking down an individual here or there that you can help on any wide movement. And this great organization that I can see in the future will have other things to do than take heed of personal delinquencies—except in so far as to purge out from itself unworthy members. Its action will affect continents, not persons."

"You can see that: you believe that, Brand?" Lord Evelyn said, turning and regarding him.

"Yes, I think so," he answered, without enthusiasm, but with simple sincerity. Presently he said: "You remember, Evelyn, the morning we turned out of the little inn on the top of the Niessen, to see the sun rise over the Bernese Alps?"

"I remember it was precious cold," said Lord Evelyn, almost with a shiver.

"You remember, when we got to the highest point, we looked down into the great valleys, where the lakes and the villages were; and there it was still night under the heavy clouds. But

before us, where the peaks of the Jungfrau, and the Wetterhorn, and the rest of them rose into the clear sky, there was a curious faint light that showed the day was coming. And we waited and watched; and the light grew stronger; and all sorts of colours began to show along the peaks. That was the sunrise. But down in the valleys everything was misty and dark and cold; everything asleep; the people there could see nothing of the new day we were looking at. And so I suppose it is with us now. We are looking ahead. We see, or fancy we see, the light before the others; but sooner or later they will see it also. For the sunrise is bound to come."

They continued talking; and they paced up and down the decks; while the half-hours and hours were struck by the bells. The moon was declining to the horizon. Long ago the last of the revellers had left the smoking-room; and there was nothing to interrupt the stillness but the surge of the waters.

Then again—

"Have you noticed Natalie's mother of late? It is a pleasure to watch the poor woman's face; she seems to drink in happiness by merely looking

at her daughter; every time that Natalie laughs you can see her mother's eyes brighten."

"I have noticed a great change in Natalie herself," Evelyn said. "She is looking younger; she has lost that strange, half-apprehensive expression of the eyes; and she seems to be in excellent spirits. Calabressa is more devotedly her slave than ever."

"You should have seen him when Von Zoesch told him to pack up and be off to America."

By-and-by he said—

"You know, Evelyn, if you can't stay in America with us altogether—and that would be too much to expect—don't say anything as yet to Natalie about your going back. She has the notion that our little colony is to be founded as a permanency."

"Oh, I am in no hurry," said Evelyn, carelessly. "Things will get along at home well enough without me. Didn't I tell you that once those girls began to go they would go like lightning? It is rough on Blanche, though, that Truda should come next. By the way, in any case, Brand, I must remain in America for your wedding."

"Oh, you will, will you?" said Brand. "Then that settles one point. You won't be going back very soon."

"Why?"

"Of course, Natalie and I won't marry until she is of age; that is a good year and a half yet. Did you hear of Calabressa's mad proposal: that he should extort from Lind his consent to our marriage as the price of the good news that he, Calabressa, had to reveal? Like him, wasn't it? —an ingenious scheme."

"What did you say?"

"Why, what could I say! I would not be put under any obligation to Lind on any account whatever. We can wait; it is not a long time."

The moonlight waned; and there was another light slowly declaring itself in the east. The two friends continued talking; and did not notice how that the cold blue light beyond the sea was gradually yielding to a silver-grey. The pilot and first mate, who were on the bridge, had just been joined by the captain.

The silver-grey in its turn gave place to a clear yellow; and high up one or two flakes of cloud became of a saffron-red. Then the burning

edge of the sun appeared over the waves; the world lightened; the masts and funnels of the steamer caught the glory streaming over from the east. The ship seemed to waken also; one or two stragglers came tumbling up from below, rubbing their eyes, and staring strangely around them; but as yet no land was in sight.

The sunrise now flooded the sky and the sea; the numbers of those on deck increased; and at last there was an eager passing round of binoculars; and a murmur of eager interest. Those with sharp eyes enough could make out, right ahead, in the midst of the pale glow of the morning, a thin blue line of coast.

The great steamer surged on through the sunlit waters. And now even those who were without glasses could distinguish, here and there along that line of pale-blue land, a touch of yellowish-white; and they guessed that the new world there was already shining with the light of the new day. Brand felt a timid, small hand glide into his. Natalie was standing beside him, her beautiful black hair a trifle dishevelled, perhaps; and her eyes still bearing traces of her having been in the realm of dreams. But those

eyes were full of tenderness, nevertheless, as she met his look. He asked her if she could make out that strip of coast beyond the shining waters.

"Can you see, Natalie? It is our future home."

"Oh yes, I can see it," she said. "And the sunrise is there before us: it is a happy sign."

* * * * *

There remains to be added only this—that about the last thing Natalie Lind did before leaving England was to go and plant some flowers, carefully and tenderly, on Kirski's grave; and that about the first thing she did on landing in America was to write to Madame Potecki, asking her to look after the little Anneli, and sending many loving messages. For this girl—or rather, this beautiful child, as Calabressa would persist in calling her—had a large heart, that could hold many affections, and many memories; and that was not capable of forgetting any one who had been kind to her.

THE END.

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